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# **THE WAY THROUGH THE WOODS**

## Colin Dexter

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Weather and rain have undone it again, And now you would never know  
There was once a road through the woods Before they planted the trees. It is  
underneath the coppice and heath And the thin anemones. Only the keeper  
sees That, where the ring-dove broods, And the badgers roll at ease, There was  
once a road through the woods.

From *The Way Through the Woods* by Rudyard Kipling

### WYTHAM WOODS







# THE WAY THROUGH THE WOODS

## PROLEGOMENON

Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be whiter, yea whiter, than snow  
(Isaiah, ch. i, v. 18)

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent (Wittgenstein,  
Philosophical Investigations)

'I must speak to you.'

'Speak on, my child.'

'I've not often come to your church.'

'It is not my church - it is God's church. We are all children of God.'

'I've come to confess a big sin.'

'It is proper that all sins should be confessed.'

'Can all sins be forgiven?'

'When we, sinful mortals as we are, can find it in our hearts to forgive each other, think only of our infinitely merciful Father, who understands our every weakness -who knows us all far better than we know ourselves.'

'I don't believe in God.'

'And you consider that as of any great importance?'

'I don't understand you.'

'Would it not be of far greater importance if God did not believe in you?'

'You're speaking like a Jesuit.'

'Forgive me.'

'It's not you - it's me who wants forgiveness.'

'Do you recall Pilgrim, when at last he confessed his sins to God? How the weight of the great burden was straightway lifted from his shoulders -like the pain that eases with the lancing of an abscess?'

'You sound as if you've said that all before.'

'Those self-same words I have said to others, yes.'

'Others?'

'I cannot talk of them. Whatever it is that men and women may confess to me, they confess -through me - to God.'

'You're not really needed at all, then - is that what you are saying?'

'I am a servant of God. Sometimes it is granted me to help those who are truly sorry for their sins.'

'What about those who aren't?'

'I pray that God will touch their hearts.'

'Will God forgive them - whatever they've done? You believe that, Father?'

'I do.'

'The scenes of the concentration camps . . .'

'What scenes have you in mind, my child?'

The "sins", Father.'

'Forgive me, once again. My ears are failing now -yet not my heart! My own father was tortured to death in a Japanese camp, in 1943. I was then thirteen years old. I know full well the difficulties of forgiveness. I have told this to very few.'

'Have you forgiven your father's torturers?'

'God has forgiven them, if they ever sought His forgiveness.'

'Perhaps it's more forgivable to commit atrocities in times of war.'

'There is no scale of better or of worse, whether in times of peace or in times of war. The laws of God are those that He has created. They are steadfast and firm as the fixed stars in the heavens -unchangeable for all eternity. Should a man hurl himself down headlong from the heights of the Temple, he will break himself upon the law of God; but never will he break the universal

law that God has once ordained.'

'You are a Jesuit.'

'I am a man, too. And all men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.'

'Father

'Speak on, my child.'

'Perhaps you will report what I confess . . .'

'Such a thing a priest could never do.'

'But what if I wanted you to report it?'

'My holy office is to absolve, in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, the sins of all who show a true repentance. It is not my office to pursue the workings of the Temporal Power.'

'You haven't answered my question.'

'I am aware of that.'

'What if I wanted you to report me to the police?'

'I would be unsure of my duty. I would seek the advice of my bishop.'

'You've never been asked such a thing before?'

'Never.'

'What if I repeat my sin?'

'Unlock your thoughts. Unlock those sinful thoughts to me.'

'I can't do that.'

'Would you tell me everything if I could guess the reasons for your refusal?'

'You could never do that.'

'Perhaps I have already done so.'

'You know who I am, then?'

'Oh yes, my child. I think I knew you long ago.'

# CHAPTER ONE

A perpetual holiday is a good working definition of Hell  
(George Bernard Shaw)

MORSE never took his fair share of holidays, so he told himself. So he was telling Chief Superintendent Strange that morning in early June.

'Remember you've also got to take into consideration the time you regularly spend in pubs, Morse!'

'A few hours here and there, perhaps, I agree. It wouldn't be all that difficult to work out how much - '

' "Quantify", that's the word you're looking for.'

'I'd never look for ugly words like "quantify".'

'A useful word, Morse. It means - well, it means to say how much . . .'

'That's just what I said, isn't it?'

'I don't know why I argue with you!'

Nor did Morse.

For many years now, holidays for Chief Inspector Morse of Thames Valley CID had been periods of continuous and virtually intolerable stress. And what they must normally be like for men with the extra handicaps of wives and children, even Morse for all his extravagant imagination could scarcely conceive. But for this year, for the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-two, he was resolutely determined that things would be different: he would have a

holiday away from Oxford. Not abroad, though. He had no wanderlust for Xanadu or Isfahan; indeed he very seldom travelled abroad at all -although it should be recorded that several of his colleagues attributed such insularity more than anything to Morse's faint-hearted fear of aeroplanes. Yet as it happened it had been one of those same colleagues who had first set things in motion.

'Lime, mate! Lime's marvellous!'

Lime?

Only several months later had the word finally registered in Morse's mind, when he had read the advertisement in The Observer: THE BAY HOTEL Lyme Regis

Surely one of the finest settings of any hotel in the West Country! We are the only hotel on the Marine Parade and we enjoy panoramic views from Portland Bill to the east, to the historic Cobb Harbour to the west. The hotel provides a high standard of comfort and cuisine, and a friendly relaxed atmosphere. There are level walks to the shops and harbour, and traffic-free access to the beach, which is immediately in front of the hotel.

For full details please write to The Bay Hotel, Lyme Regis, Dorset; or just telephone (0297) 442059. 'It gets tricky,' resumed Strange, 'when a senior man takes more than a fortnight's furlough you realize that, of course.' 'I'm not taking more than what's due to me.' 'Where are you thinking of?' 'Lyme Regis.' 'Ah. Glorious Devon.' 'Dorset, sir.' 'Next door, surely?' 'Persuasion -it's where some of the scenes in Persuasion are set.' 'Ah.' Strange looked suitably blank. 'And The French Lieutenant's Woman.' 'Ah. I'm with you. Saw that at the pictures with the wife . . . Or was it on the box?'

'Well, there we are then,' said Morse lamely. For a while there was a silence. Then Strange shook his head. 'You couldn't stick being away that long! Building sand-castles? For over a fortnight?' 'Coleridge country too, sir. I'll probably drive around a bit -have a look at Ottery St Mary .

. . some of the old haunts.' A low chuckle emanated from somewhere deep in Strange's belly. 'He's been dead for ages, man

more Max's cup o' tea than yours.' Morse smiled wanly. 'But you wouldn't mind me seeing his -place?' 'It's gone. The rectory's gone. Bulldozed years ago.' 'Really?' Strange puckered his lips, and nodded his head. 'You think I'm an ignorant sod, don't you,

Morse? But let me tell you something. There was none of this child-centred nonsense when I was at school. In those days we all had to learn things off by heart --things like yer actual Ancient Bloody Mariner.'

'My days too, sir.' It irked Morse that Strange, only a year his senior, would always treat him like a representative of some much Younger generation. But Strange was in full flow.

,

You don't forget it, Morse. It sticks.' He peered briefly but earnestly around the lumber room of some olden memories; then found what he was seeking, and with high seriousness intoned a stanza learned long since:

'All in a hot and copper sky The bloody sun at noon Right up above the mast did stand No bigger than the bloody moon!'

'Very good, sir,' said Morse, uncertain whether the monstrous misquotation were deliberate or

not, for he found the chief superintendent watching him shrewdly. 'No. You won't last the distance. You'll be back in Oxford within the week. You'll see!' 'So what? There's plenty for me to do here.' 'Oh?' 'For a start there's a drain-pipe outside the flat that's leaking-' Strange's eyebrows shot up. 'And you're telling me you're going to fix that?' 'I'll get it fixed,' said Morse ambiguously. 'I've already got a bit of extra piping but the,

er, diameter of the cross-section is ... rather too narrow.' 'It's too bloody small, you mean? Is that what you're trying to say' Morse nodded, a little sheepishly. The score was one-all.

## CHAPER TWO

Mrs Austen was well enough in 1804 to go with her husband and Jane for a holiday to Lyme Regis. Here we hear Jane's voice speaking once again in cheerful tones. She gives the news about lodgings and servants, about new acquaintances and walks on the Cobb, about some enjoyable sea bathing, about a ball at the local Assembly Rooms

(David Cecil, A Portrait of Jane Austen)

'IF I may say so, sir, you really are rather lucky.'

The proprietor of the only hotel on the Marine Parade pushed the register across and Morse quickly completed the Date - Name - Address -Car Registration -Nationality columns. As he did so, it was out of long habit rather than any interest or curiosity that his eye took in just a few, details about the half-dozen or so persons, single and married, who had signed in just before him.

There had been a lad amongst Morse's fellow pupils in the sixth form who had possessed a virtually photographic memory -a memory which Morse had much admired. Not that his own memory was at all bad; short term, in fact, it was still functioning splendidly. And that is why, in one of those pre-signed lines, there was just that single little detail which very soon would be drifting back towards the shores of Morse's consciousness . . .

'To be honest, sir, you're very lucky. The good lady who had to cancel -one of our regular clients -had booked the room as soon as she knew when we were opening for the season, and she especially wanted -she always wanted -a room



overlooking the bay, with bath and WC en suite facilities, of course.'

Morse nodded his acknowledgement of the anonymous woman's admirable taste. 'How long had she booked for?'

'Three nights: Friday, Saturday, Sunday.'

Morse nodded again. 'I'll stay the same three nights -if that's all right,' he decided, wondering what was preventing the poor old biddy from once more enjoying her private view of the waves and -exclusive use of a water-closet. Bladder, like as not.

'Enjoy your stay with us!' The proprietor handed Morse three keys on a ring: one to Room 27; one (as he learned) for the hotel's garage, situated two minutes' walk away from the sea front; and one for the front entrance, should he arrive back after midnight. If you'd just like to get your luggage out, I'll see it's taken up to your room while you put the car away. The police allow our guests to park temporarily of course, but. . .'

Morse looked down at the street-map given to him, and turned to go. Thanks very much. And let's hope the old girl manages to get down here a bit later in the season,' he added, considering it proper to grant her a limited commiseration.

'Afraid she won't do that.'

'No?'

'She's dead.'

'Oh dear!'

'Very sad.'

'Still, perhaps she had a pretty good innings?'

'I wouldn't call forty-one a very good innings. Would you?'

'No.'

'Hodgkin's disease. You know what that's like.'

'Yes,' lied the chief inspector, as he backed towards the exit in chastened mood. I'll just get the luggage out. We don't want any trouble with the police. Funny lot, sometimes!'

'They may be in your part of the world, but they're very fair to is here.'

'I didn't mean-'

'Will you be taking dinner with us, sir?'

'Yes. Yes, please. I think I'd enjoy that.'

A few minutes after Morse had driven the maroon Jaguar slowly along the Lower Road, a woman (who certainly looked no older a the one who had earlier that year written in to book Room 27) turned into the Bay Hotel, stood for a minute or so by the reception desk, then pressed the Please-Ring-For-Service bell.

She had just returned from a walk along the upper level of Marine Parade, on the west side, and out to the Cobb -that great granite barrier that circles a protective arm around the harbour and assuages the incessant pounding of the sea. It was not a happy walk. That late afternoon a breeze had sprung up from the south, the sky had clouded over, and several people now promenading along the front in the

intermittent drizzle were struggling into lightweight plastic macs.

'No calls for me?' she asked, when the proprietor reappeared.

'No, Mrs Hardinge. There's been nothing else.'

'OK.' But she said it in such a way as if it weren't OK, and the proprietor found himself wondering if the call he'd taken in mid-afternoon had been of greater significance than he'd thought. Possibly not, though; for suddenly she seemed to relax, and she smiled at him -most attractively.

The grid that guarded the drinks behind reception was no longer in place and already two couples were seated in the bar enjoying their dry sherries; and with them one elderly spinster fussing over a dachshund, one of those small dogs accepted at the management's discretion: £2.50 per diem, excluding food'.

'I think I'll have a large malt.'

'Soda?'

'Just ordinary water, please.'

'Say when.'

' "When"!'

'On your room-bill, Mrs Hardinge?'

'Please! Room fourteen.'

She sat on the green leather wall-seat just beside the main entrance. The whisky tasted good and she told herself that however powerful the arguments for total abstinence might

be, few could challenge the fact that after alcohol the world almost invariably appeared a kinder, friendlier place.

The Times lay on the coffee table beside her, and she picked it up and scanned the headlines briefly before turning to the back page, folding the paper horizontally, then vertically, and then studying one across.

It was a fairly easy puzzle; and some twenty minutes later her not inconsiderable cruciverbalist skills had coped with all but a couple of clues -one of them a tantalizingly half-familiar quotation from Samuel Taylor Coleridge -over which she was still frowning when the lady of the establishment interrupted her with the evening's menu, and asked if she were taking dinner.

For a few minutes after ordering Seafood Soup with Fresh garden Herbs, followed by Guinea Fowl in Leek and Mushroom Sauce, she sat with eyes downcast and smoked a king-sized Dunhill cigarette. Then, as if on sudden impulse, she went into the glass-paned telephone booth that stood beside the entrance and rang a number, her lips soon working in a sort of silent charade, like the mouth of some frenetic goldfish, as she fed a succession of 20p's into the coin-slot. But no one could hear what she was saying.

## CHAPER THREE

Have you noticed that life, real honest-to-goodness life, with murders and

catastrophes and fabulous inheritances, happens almost exclusively in the

newspapers?

(Jean Anouilh, *The Rehearsal*)

MORSE found his instructions fairly easy to follow. Driving from the small car park at the eastern end of Marine Parade, then turning right, then left just before the traffic lights, he had immediately spotted the large shed-like building on his left in the narrow one-way Coombe Street; 'Private Garage for Residents of The Bay Hotel'. Herein, as Morse saw after propping open the two high wooden gates, were eighteen parking spaces, marked out in diagonal white lines, nine on each side of a central KEEP CLEAR corridor. By reason of incipient spondylosis, he was not nowadays particularly skilled at reversing into such things as slanting parking bays; and since the garage was already almost full, it took him rather longer than it should have done to back the Jaguar into a happily angled position, with the sides of his car equidistant from a J-reg Mercedes and a Y-reg Vauxhall. It was out of habit as before that he scanned the number plates of the cars there; but when about a quarter of an hour earlier he'd glanced through the hotel register, at least something had clicked in his mind.

Now though? Nothing. Nothing at all.

There was no real need for Morse immediately to explore the facilities of Room 27, and the drinks-bar faced him as he turned into the hotel. So he ordered a pint of Best Bitter, and sat down in the wall-seat, just by the entrance, and almost exactly on the same square footage of green leather that had been vacated ten minutes earlier by one of the two scheduled occupants of Room 14.

He should have been feeling reasonably satisfied with life, surely? But he wasn't. Not really. At that particular moment he longed for both the things he had that very morning solemnly avowed to eschew for the remaining days of his leave: cigarettes and newspapers. Cigarettes he had given up so often in the past that he found such a feat comparatively simple; never previously however had he decided that it would be of some genuine benefit to his peace of mind to be wholly free for a week or so from the regular diet of disasters served up by the quality dailies. Perhaps that was a silly idea too, though .

His right hand was feeling instinctively for the reassuring square packet in his jacket pocket, when the maitresse d'hotel appeared, wished him a warm welcome, and gave him the menu. It may have been a matter of something slightly more than coincidence that Morse had no hesitation in choosing the Seafood Soup and the Guinea Fowl. Perhaps not, though -and the point is of little importance.

'Something to drink with your meal, sir?' She was a pleasantly convivial woman, in her late forties, and Morse glanced appreciatively at the décolletage of her black dress as she bent forward with the wine list.

'What do you recommend?'

'Half a bottle of Medoc? Splendid vintage! You won't do much better than that.'

'A bottle might be better,' suggested Morse.

'A bottle it shall be, sir!'- the agreement signed with mutual smiles.

'Could you open it now - and leave it on the table?'

'We always do it that way here.'

'I, er, I didn't know.'

'It likes to breathe a little, doesn't it?'

'Like all of us,' muttered Morse; but to himself, for she was gone.

He realized that he was feeling hungry. He didn't often feel hungry usually he took most of his calories in liquid form; usually, when invited to a College gaudy, he could manage only a couple of the courses ordained; usually he would willingly exchange an entée or a dessert for an extra ration of alcohol. But this evening he was feeling hungry, quite definitely; and just after finishing his second pint of beer (still no cigarette!) he was glad to be informed his meal was ready. Already, several times, he had looked through the glass doors to his left, through to the dining room, where many now sat eating at their tables, white tablecloths overlaid with coverings of deep maroon, beneath the subdued lighting of crystal chandeliers. It looked inviting. Romantic, almost.

As he stood by the dining-room door for a moment, the maitresse was quickly at his side, expressing the hope that

he wouldn't mind, for this evening, sharing a table? They had quite a few nonresidents in for dinner . . .

Morse bade the good lady lose no sleep over such a trivial matter, and followed her to one of the farthest tables, where an empty place was laid opposite a woman, herself seated half-facing the wall, reading a copy of *The Times*, an emptied bowl of Seafood Soup in front of her. She lowered the newspaper, smiled in a genteel sort of way, as though it had taken her some effort to stretch her painted lips into a perfunctory salutation, before reverting her attention to something clearly more interesting than her table companion.

The room was almost completely full, and it was soon obvious to Morse that he was going to be the very last to get served. The sweet-trolley was being pushed round, and he heard the elderly couple to his right ordering some caramelized peaches with nuts and cream; but -strangely for him! -he felt no surge of impatience. In any case, the soup was very soon with him, and the wine had been there already; and all around him was goodwill and enjoyment, with a low, steady buzz of conversation, and occasionally some muted laughter. But the newspaper opposite him, for the present, remained firmly in place.

It was over the main course - his only slightly after hers - that Morse ventured his first, not exactly original, gambit:

'Been here long?'

She shook her head.

'Nor me. Only just arrived, in fact.'

'And me.' (She could speak!)



'I'm only here for a few days ...'

'Me, too. I'm leaving on Sunday.'

It was the longest passage of speech Morse was likely to get, he knew, for the eyes had drifted down again to the Guinea Fowl. Stayed on the Guinea Fowl.

Bugger you! thought Morse. Yet his interest, in spite of himself, was beginning to be engaged. Her lower teeth -a little too long maybe? -were set closely together and slightly stained with nicotine; yet her gums were fresh and pink, her full mouth undoubtedly attractive. But he noticed something else as well: her mottled, tortoise-shell eyes, though camouflaged around with artificial shadow, seemed somehow darkened by a sadder, more durable shadow; and he could see an intricate little criss-cross of red lines at the outer side of either eye. She might have a slight cold, of course.

Or she might earlier have been weeping a little . . .

When the sweet-trolley came, Morse was glad that he was only halfway down the Medoc, for some cheese would go nicely with it 'Cheddar . . . Gouda . . . Stilton . . .' the waitress recited; and he ordered Stilton, just as the woman opposite had done.

Gambit Number Two appeared in order.

'We seem to have similar tastes,' he ventured.

'Identical, it seems.'

'Except for the wine.'

'Mm?'

'Would you, er, like a glass of wine? Rather good! It'll go nicely with the Stilton.'

This time she merely shook her head, disdaining to add any verbal gloss.

Bugger you! thought Morse, as she picked up The Times once more, unfolded the whole broadsheet in front of her, and hid herself away completely - together with her troubles.

The fingers holding the paper, Morse noticed, were quite slim and sinuous, like those of an executant violinist, with the unpainted nails immaculately manicured, the half-moons arching whitely :-over the well-tended cuticles. On the third finger of her left hand was a narrow-banded gold wedding ring, and above it an engagement ring with four large diamonds, set in an unusual twist, which might have sparkled in any room more brightly lit than this.'

On the left of the opened double-page spread (as Morse viewed things) her right hand held the newspaper just above the crossword, and he noticed that only two clues remained to be solved. A few years earlier his eyes would have had little trouble; but now, inspite of a sequence of squints, he could still not quite read the elusive wording of the first clue, which looked like a quotation. Better luck with the other half of the paper though, held rather nearer to him -especially with the article, the quite extraordinary article, that suddenly caught and held and dominated his attention.

At the foot of the page was the headline: 'Police pass sinister verses to Times' man', and Morse had almost made out the whole of the first paragraph

THE LITERARY correspondent of The Times, Mr Howard Phillip-son, has been called upon by the Oxfordshire police

to help solve a complex riddle-me-ree, the answer to which is believed to pinpoint the spot where a young woman's body

- when the waitress returned to the table. 'Coffee, madame?' 'Please.' 'In the bar - or in the lounge?' 'In the bar, I think.' 'You, sir?' 'No. No, thank you.' Before leaving, the waitress poured the last of the Medoc into Morse's glass; and on the other

side of the table the newspaper was folded away. To all intents and purposes the meal was over. Curiously, however, neither seemed over-anxious to leave immediately, and for several moments they sat silently together, the last pair but one in the dining room: he, longing for a cigarette and eager to read what looked like a most interesting article; wondering, too, whether he should make one last foray into enemy territory -since, on reflection, she really did look rather attractive.

'Would you mind if I smoked?' he ventured, half-reaching for the tempting packet.

'It doesn't matter to me.' She rose abruptly, gathering up handbag and newspaper. 'But I don't think the management will be quite so accommodating.' She spoke without hostility - even worse, without interest, it seemed - as she pointed briefly to a notice beside the door:

IN THE INTERESTS OF PUBLIC HEALTH, WE RESPECTFULLY  
REQUEST YOU REFRAIN FROM SMOKING IN THE DINING  
AREA THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION.

Bugger you! Thought Morse

He'd not been very sensible though, he realized that. All he'd had to do was ask to borrow the newspaper for a couple

of minutes. He could still ask her, of course. But he wasn't going to oh no! She could stick her bloody paper down the loo for all he cared. It didn't matter. Almost every newsagent in Lyme Regis would have a few unsold copies of yesterday's newspapers, all ready to be -packaged off mid-morning to the wholesale distributors. He'd seen such things a thousand times.

She'd go to the bar, she'd said. All right, he would go to the lounge . . . where very soon he was sitting back in a deep armchair enjoying another pint of bitter and a large malt. And just to finish the evening, he told himself, he'd have a cigarette, just one -well two at the very outside.

It was growing dark now -but the evening air was very mild; and as he sat by the semi-opened window he listened again to the grating roar of the pebbles dragged down by the receding tide, and his mind went to a line from 'Dover Beach':

But now I only hear its melancholy, long withdrawing roar.

Much-underrated poet, Matthew Arnold, he'd always thought.

In the bar, Mrs Hardinge was drinking her coffee, sipping a Cointreau - and, if truth be told, thinking for just a little while of keen blue eyes of the man who had been sitting opposite her dinner. IN THE INTERESTS OF PUBLIC HEALTH, WE RESPECTFULLY REQUEST YOU TO REFRAIN FROM SMOKING IN THE DINING AREA. THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION.

CHAPTER FOUR The morning is wiser than the evening  
(Russian proverb)

MORSE rose at 6.45 the following morning, switched on his room-kettle, and made himself a cup of coffee from one of the several sachets and small milk-tubs provided. He opened the curtains and stood watching the calm sea, and a fishing boat just leaving the Cobb. Blast! He'd meant to bring his binoculars.

The gulls floated and wheeled across the esplanade, occasionally hanging motionless, as if suspended from the sky, before turning away like fighter-aircraft peeling from their formation and swooping from his vision.

The sun had already risen, a great ball of orange over the cliffs to the east, over Charmouth -where they said someone had discovered a dinosaur or a pterodactyl, or something, that had lived in some distant prehistoric age, some figure with about twelve noughts after it. Or was it twenty?

Deciding that he really ought to learn more about the world of natural history, Morse drained his coffee and without shaving walked down to the deserted ground floor, out of the hotel, and left along Marine Parade - where his search began.

The newsagent on the corner felt pretty sure that he hadn't got a previous day's Times: Sun, yes; Mirror, yes; Express, yes . . . but. no -no Times. Sorry, mate. Turning left, Morse struggled up the steep incline of Broad Street. Still out of breath, he enquired in the newsagent's shop halfway up on the left. Telegraph, Guardian, Independent -any good? No? Sorry, sir. Morse got another 'sir' in the newsagent's just opposite -but no Times. He carried on to the top of the hill, turned left at a rather seedy-looking cinema, then left again into Cobb Road, and down to the western end of Marine Parade -where a fourth newsagent was likewise unable to

assist, with the chief inspector reduced in rank to 'mate' once more.

Never mind! Libraries kept back numbers of all the major dailies; and if he were desperate - which he most certainly wasn't he could always go down on his knees and beg Mrs Misery-guts to let him take a peek at her newspaper. If she'd still got it ... Forget it, Morse! What's it matter, anyway?

What's she matter?

Strolling briskly now along the front, Morse breathed deeply on the early-morning air cigarettes were going to be out that day. Completely out. He had, he realized, just walked a sort of rectangle; well, a 'trapezium' really -that was the word: a quadrilateral with two parallel sides. And doubtless he would have told himself it wouldn't be a bad idea to brush up on his geometry had he not caught sight of a figure in front of him, about two hundred yards distant. For there, beneath the white canopy of the buff-coloured Bay Hotel, with its yellow two-star AA sign, stood Mrs Hardinge, Mrs Crabcrumpet herself, dressed in a full-length black leather coat, and searching in a white shoulder-bag. For a purse, probably? But before she could find it she raised her right hand a greeting as a taxi drew up along the lower road, its driver manoeuvring 180 degrees in the turning area, then getting out and opening the near-side rear door for the elegant, luggageless woman who had just walked down the ramp. Morse, who had stopped ostensibly to survey the ranks of fruit machines in the Novelty Emporium, looked down at his wrist-watch: 7.50 a.m.

The ground floor was still deserted, and as yet no delicious smell fried bacon betrayed the opening of the hostelry's daily routine. Morse passed by the giant potted-palm, passed by the statue of a maiden perpetually pouring a slow

trickle from her water-jug into the pool at her feet, and was starting up the stairs when his eye fell on the reception desk to his right: a jar of artificial flowers; a tray of mineral water; a yellow RNLI collecting box; and below a stack of brochures and leaflets - the hotel register.

He glanced : \_ad him. No one. He looked swiftly along the linear information once again:

3.7.92 -Mr and Mrs ¢. A Hardinge -16 Cathedral Mews,  
Salisbury - H 35 LWL

- British - Rm 14 It had been the Oxfordshire letter-registration, LWL, which had [caught his eye that previous evening. Now it was something else: ¢. It was her all right though, for he'd seen the room number her key-ring at dinner. And frowning slightly as he mounted the stairs, he found himself wondering how many married women were unable to write out the accepted formula for their wedded state without getting the wrong initial. Perhaps she was only recently married? Perhaps she was one of those liberated ladies who had suddenly decided that if only one initial were required it was going to be hers? Perhaps . . . perhaps they weren't 'Mr and Mrs' at all, and she had been momentarily confused about what names they were going under this time?

The latter, he thought - a little sadly.

Breakfast (8.45 a.m.-9.30 a.m.) was for Morse a solitary affair, yet he was finding it, as ever, the biggest single joy of any holiday. After some Kellogg's Corn Flakes and a mixed grill, he strolled along the edge of the sea once more, feeling pleasantly replete and (he supposed) about as content as he was ever likely to be. The weather forecast was good, and he decided that he would drive out west to Ottery St Mary and

then, if the mood took him, north up to Nether Stowey, and the Quantocks.

As he reached the second-floor landing after his return to the hotel, Room 14 was almost directly in front of him; and with the door slightly ajar, as one blue-uniformed room-maid came out with a Hoover, he could see another maid inside the room replenishing the sachets of coffee and tea and the little tubs of milk. He took his chance. Knocking (not too hesitantly), he put his head round the door.

'Mrs Hardinge in?'

'No, sur.' She looked no more than eighteen, and Morse felt emboldened.

'It's just that she promised to keep yesterday's newspaper for me -we had dinner here together last night. The Times, it was.'

The maid gave Morse a dubious look as he cast a swift glance over the room. The bed nearer the window had been slept in -the pillow deeply indented, a flimsy black negligee thrown carelessly over the duvet. But had Mr Hardinge slept in the other? The bed could have been made up already, of course . . . but where was his case and his clothes and his other impedimenta?

'I'm afraid there's no newspaper as I can see 'ere, sur. In any case, I wouldn't-'

'Please, please! I fully understand. I mean, if it's not in the waste-paper basket. . .'

'No, it's not.'



'There'd be another basket, though? In the bathroom? It's just that she did say . . .'

The young girl peered cautiously round the bathroom door, but shook her head.

Morse smiled affably. 'It's all right. She must have left it somewhere else for me. Probably in my room. Huh! Sorry to have bothered you.'

Back in Room 27, he found his own bed made up, the floor hoovered, and his coffee cup washed and placed upside-down on its matching saucer. He stood for several minutes looking out at the sea again, telling himself he must re-read *The Odyssey*; and soon, almost unconsciously, finding himself smoking one of his forbidden cigarettes and wondering why the brown leather suitcase he had just seen lying closed on the set of drawers in Room 14 bore, in an attractive Gothic script, the gilt letters 'C S O'. The only thing he knew with such initials was Community Service Order -but that seemed wholly unlikely. Must be her initials, surely. But whatever the C stood for -Carole? Catherine? Claire? Celia? Constance? -it was going to be obvious even to an under-achiever in the new seven-year-old reading tests that the O didn't stand for 'Hardinge'. It may reasonably have been the lady's name before she got married. But the case was a new one - a very new one . . .

So what, Morse! So bloody what! He sat down and wrote a note.

Dear Mrs H, I shall be most grateful if you can save yesterday's Times for me. Not the Business/Sport section; just the main newspaper - in fact I only really want to look at the bit on p. 1 (and probably a continuation on an inside page) about the 'Sinister Verses' article. Your reward, which

you must accept, will be a drink on me at the bar before dinner, when I promise to adhere religiously to every one of the management's ordinances.

## Room 27

Leaving this innocent, if rather pompous, communication with the proprietor, Morse walked along to the private garage, pondering the reason why the female half of Room 14 had not made use of car H 35 LWL instead of ordering a taxi. Pondering only briefly though, since he thought he now knew why Mrs C. Something (Hardinge?) had been acting so strangely. Well, no -not 'strangely', not if you looked at it from her point of view. Forget it, Morse! Get your road atlas out and trace the easiest route to Ottery St Mary.

Soon the Jaguar was on its way, with the sun growing warmer by the minute, and hardly a cloud in the bluest of skies. By the time he reached Honiton, Morse had almost forgotten the rather odd fact that when he had looked just now around the other cars in the hotel's garage, there had been no sign whatsoever of any vehicle with the registration H 35 LWL.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Extract from a diary dated 26 June 1992 (one week before Morse had found himself in Lyme Regis)

Words! Someone -a Yank I think -said you can stroke people with words. I say -sod words! Especially sod the sight of words. They're too powerful. 'Naked's powerful. 'Breasts' are powerful. Larkin said he thought the most splendid verb in the language was 'unbutton'. But when the words are a joke? Oh God, help me! Please God, help me! Yesterday Tom wrote me a letter from his new house in Maidstone. Here's part of what he wrote

I've got a pair of great tits in the garden here. Now don't you go and think that when I look down from my study window with the binocs you bought me there's this bronzed and topless and vasty bosomed signora sunning herself on a Lilo. No! Just a wonderfully entertaining little pair of great tits who've taken up residence -a bit late aren't they? -in the nesting-box we fixed under the beech tree. Remember that line we learned at school? Titvre tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi ...

These are Tom's words. Wouldn't you think that any normally civilized soul would be delighted with the thought of those little blue black white yellow birds (my speciality!!) slipping their slim little selves into a nesting-box? Wouldn't you think that only a depraved and perverted mind would dwell instead upon that picture of a woman on a sunbed? Wouldn't you think that any sensitive soul would rejoice in that glorious Virgilian hexameter instead of seeing another 'tit' in the opening word? Christ, it was a pun wasn't it! The Greek term is 'paronomasia'. I'd forgotten that but I just looked it up in my book of literary terms And still the words follow me. Looking through the p's I found 'pornography' again. Words! Bloody hell. God help me!

'Common subjects of such exotic pornography are sadism, masochism, fetishism, transvestism, voyeurism (or scopophilia), narcissism, pederasty, and necrophilia. Less common subjects are coprophilia, kleptomania, and zoophilia.'

Should it be a fraction of comfort that my tastes don't yet run to these last three 'less common' perversions -if that's the right word. What does the middle one mean anyway? It's not in Chambers.

(Later) Dinner in SCR very good -'Barbue Housman'. I phoned C afterwards and I almost dare to believe she's really looking forward to next weekend. I just wish I could go to sleep and wake up on the 3rd. But I seem to spend half my time wishing my life away. I have drunk too much. Oh God, let me sleep well

## **CHAPTER Six**

. . . and hence through life Chasing chance-started friendships (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'To the Revd George Coleridge')

IN MID-AFTERNOON Morse looked back on his Coleridge pilgrimidge with considerable disappointment.

Half a dozen miles west of Honiton he had turned left off the A30 for the little market town of Ottery St Mary. Parking had proved a virtually insuperable problem; and when he finally got to the Information Office he learned only that 'Coleridge was born in 1772 at the Rectory (gone), the tenth child of The Revd Coleridge, vicar 1760-81, and master of the Grammar School gone). The rapidly growing family soon occupied the old School (gone) . . .'. St Mary's was still there though, and he walked round the large church consulting some printed notes on 'Points Interest', fixed to a piece of wood shaped like a hand-mirror. He began to feel, as he read, that it was high time he re-familiarized himself with 'corbels' and 'mouldings' and 'ogees'; but it was something of a surprise that the author of the notes appeared never to have heard of Coleridge. Indeed it was only by accident that as was leaving the church he spotted a memorial plaque on the churchyard wall, with a low-relief bust of the poet beneath the spread wings of an albatross.

An hour and a half later, after a fast drive up the M5, Morse was equally disappointed with the village of Nether Stowey. 'The small thatched cottage, damp and uncomfortable' wherein Coleridge had lived in 1796 was now enlarged, tiled, and (doubt-centrally heated, too. More to the point, it was closed to the public -on Saturdays; and today was Saturday. Inside the church leaflet available for visitors ('Please take -quite free!') was a singularly uninformative document, and Morse felt no inclination heed the vicar's exhortation to join the church fellowship -'emphasis ever on joyous informality'. He put 50p in a slot in the wall and joylessly began the drive back to Lyme Regis.

Perhaps Strange had been right all along. Perhaps he, Morse, was the sort of person who could never really enjoy a holiday. Even the pint of beer he'd drunk in a rather dreary pub in Nether Stowey had failed to satisfy, and he didn't really know what he wanted. Or rather he did: he wanted a cigarette for a start; and he wanted something to engage his brain, like a cryptic crossword or a crime -or the previous day's issue of The Times. But there was something else too, though he was hardly prepared to admit it even to himself: he would have wished Mrs Hardinge (or Mrs Whatever) to be beside him in the passenger seat.

A voice in his brain told him that he was being quite extraordinarily foolish. But he didn't listen.

At 3.45 p.m. he parked the Jaguar in the hotel garage: only three other cars there now - none of the three with the Oxon registration.

At the Corner Shop on Marine Parade, he succumbed to two temptations, and resisted a third. He bought twenty Dunhill International, and a copy of The Times; but the magazine with the seductively posed, semi-clad siren on its glossy

cover remained on the top shelf -if only because he would be too embarrassed and ashamed to face the hard-eyed man behind the counter.

Back in the hotel, he took a leisurely bath and then went down to the residents' lounge, where he unfolded the cover from the full-sized billiard table, and for half an hour or so pretended he was Steve Davis. After all, didn't The Oxford Companion to Music devote one entire page to 'Mozart-on the Billiard Table'? Morse, however, was unable to pot virtually anything, irrespective of angle or distance; and just as carefully as he had unfolded the cover he now replaced it, and returned to his room, deciding (if life should allow) to brush up on his cuemanship as well as on that glossary of architectural terms. This was exactly why holidays were so valuable, he told himself: they allowed you to stand back a bit, and see where you were going rusty.

\* It was whilst lying fully clothed on his single bed, staring soberly at the ceiling, that there was a knock on the door and he got up to open it. It was the proprietor himself, carrying a Sainsbury's supermarket carrier bag.

'Mrs Hardinge wanted you to have this, Mr Morse. I tried to find you earlier, but you were out

- and she insisted I gave it to you personally.' What was all this to Morse's ears? Music! Music! Heavenly music! Inside the carrier bag was the coveted copy of The Times, together with a 'Bay Hotel'

envelope, inside which, on a 'Bay Hotel' sheet ::" note-paper, was a brief letter:

For 27 from 14. I've seen a paperback called The Bitch by one of the Collins sisters. I've not read it but I think it must be all about me, don't you? If I'm not at dinner I'll probably

be in soon after and if you're still around you can buy me a brandy. After all these newspapers do cost honest money you know!

For Morse this innocent missive was balm and manna to the soul. It was as if he'd been trying to engage the attention of a lovely girl at a dinner party who was apparently ignoring him, and who now suddenly leaned forward and held her lips against -cheek in a more than purely perfunctory kiss.

Strangely, however, before reading the article, Morse picked up bedside phone and dialled police HQ at Kidlington.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

I read the newspaper avidly. It is my one form of continuous fiction (Aneurin\* Bevan, quoted in The Observer, 3 April 1960)

## **Police pass sinister verses to Times' man**

THE LITERARY correspondent of The Times, Mr Howard Phillipson, has been called upon by the Oxfordshire police to help solve a complex riddle-me-ree, the answer to which is believed to pinpoint the spot where a young woman's body may be buried.

The riddle, in the form of a five-stanza poem, was sent anonymously by a person who (as the police believe) knows the secret of a crime which for twelve months has remained on the unsolved-case shelves in the Thames Valley Police HQ at Kidlington, Oxfordshire.

'The poem is a fascinating one,' said Mr Phillipson, 'and I intend to spend the weekend trying to get to grips with it. After a brief preliminary look I almost think that the riddle has a strong enough internal logic to be solvable within its own context, but we must wait and see.'

According to Detective Chief Inspector Harold Johnson of Thames Valley CID the poem would fairly certainly appear to have reference to the disappearance of a Swedish student whose rucksack was found in a lay-by on the northbound carriageway of the A44, a mile or so south of Woodstock, in July 1991. Documents found in the side-panels of the rucksack had identified its owner as Karin Eriksson, a student from Uppsala, who had probably hitchhiked her way from London to Oxford, spent a day or so in the University City - and then? Who knows?

'The case was always a baffling one,' admitted DCI Johnson. 'No body was ever found, no suspicious circumstances uncovered. It is not unknown for students to be robbed of their possessions, or lose them. And of course some of them run away. But we've always thought of this as a case of potential murder.' At the time of her disappearance, Miss Eriksson's mother informed the police that Karin had phoned her from London a week or so previously, sounding 'brisk and optimistic', albeit rather short of cash. And the Principal of the secretarial college where Karin was a student



described her as 'an attractive, able, and athletic young lady'. Since the discovery of the rucksack, no trace whatever has been found, although senior police officers were last night suggesting that this new development might throw fresh light on one or two possible clues discovered during the earlier investigation. The poem in full reads as follows:

Find me, find the Swedish daughter - Thaw my frosted tegument!  
Dry the azured skylit water, Sky my everlasting tent.

Who spied, who spied that awful spot? find me! Find the  
woodman's daughter! Ask the stream: 'Why tell'st me not The  
truth thou know'st - the tragic slaughter?'

Ask the tiger, ask the sun Whither riding, what my plight? Till the  
given day be run, Till the burning of the night.

Thyme, I saw Thyme flow'ring here A creature white trapped in a  
gin, Panting like a hunted deer Licking still the bloodied skin.

With clues surveyed so wondrous laden, Hunt the ground beneath  
thy feet! Find me, find me now, thy maiden, I will kiss thee when  
we meet.

A. Austin (1853-87)

The lines were typed on a fairly old-fashioned machine, and police are hopeful that forensic tests may throw up further clues. The only immediately observable idiosyncracies of the typewriter used are the worn top segment of the lower-case 'e'. and the slight curtailment of the cross-bar in the lower-case 't'. To be truthful,' admitted Chief Inspector Johnson, 'not many of my colleagues here are all that hot on poetry, and that's why we thought The Times might help. It would be a sort of poetic justice if it could.' Final word with Mr Phillipson: 'It might all be a cruel hoax, and the link with the earlier case does appear rather tenuous, perhaps. But the police certainly seem to think they are on to something. So do I!'

Morse read the article at his own pace; then again, rather more quickly. After which, for several minutes, he sat where he was, his eyes still, his expression quite emotionless -before turning to the back page and reading the clue he hadn't quite been able to see in the evening before:

'Work without hope draws nectar in a -' (Coleridge) (5).

Huh! If the poem was a 'riddle', so was the answer! A quotation from Coleridge, too! Half smiling, he sat back in his chair and marvelled once more at the frequency of that extraordinarily common phenomenon called 'coincidence'.

Had he but known it, however, a far greater coincidence had already occurred the previous evening when (purely by chance surely?) he had been ushered into the dining room to share a table with the delectable occupant of Room 14. But as yet he couldn't know such a thing; and taking from his pocket his silver Parker pen, he wrote I and 'V in the empty squares which she had left in S-E-E - before reaching for the telephone again.

'No, sir - Superintendent Strange is still not answering. Can anyone else help?'

'Yes, perhaps so,' said Morse. 'Put me through to Traffic Control, will you?'

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

Extract from a diary dated 2 July 1992 (one day before Morse had found himself in Lyme Regis)

I must write a chapter on 'Gradualism' in my definitive opus on pornography, for it is the gradual nature of the erotic process that is all important, as even that old fascist Plato had the nous to see. Yet this is a factor increasingly forgotten by the writers and the film-directors and the video-makers. If they ever knew it 'Process' is what it should be all about. The process typified in the lifting of a full-length skirt to a point just above the ankle, or the first unfastening of a button on a blouse! Do I make things clear?

Without the skirt, what man will glory in the ankle? Without the blouse, what man will find himself aroused by the mere button? Nudity itself is nothing: it is the intent of nudity which guarantees the glorious engagement. Never did nudity in itself mean very much to me, even when I was a young boy. Never did I have any interest in all those Italian paintings of naked women. Likewise it seems to me that few of our licentious and promiscuous youth take overmuch notice of the women who flaunt their bodies daily in the tabloid press. Such young men are more interested in back-page soccer stories. Is there a moral here?

I've just read through all that shit I've just written and it makes me sound almost sane. Almost as if I'd laugh outright at any quack who suggested that I ought to go along and see somebody. But in truth there's not much to laugh about considering the wreck I've now become I've always been pererhaps. These others are bloody lucky. Christ, how lucky they are! They have their erotic fancies and imaginings and get their fixes from their filthy mags and porno flicks and casual sex. But me? Ha!, I study those articles in the quality press about the effects of pornography on the sex-crime statistics. That's what the civilized sex maniacs do. Does then pornography have the effect that is claimed? I doubt it. Yet I wish it did. Yes! Then almost everyone would be committing some dreadful sex-offence each day. I know -of course I do! -that such a state of affairs wouldn't be all that bloody marvellous for the goody-goody girls who've been guarding their virginity. But at least I would be normal! I would be normal.

Come on Time! Hurry along there! It is tomorrow that I see her and I can hardly wait to watch the hours go by. Why do I wait? Because although I have never really loved my wife (or my children all that much) I would sacrifice almost everything in my life if by so doing I could spare her the despairing humiliation of learning about my own shame.

(Later) I picked up The Guardian in the SCR and read about a Jap who murdered a young model and feasted off her flesh for a fortnight. They didn't keep him in jail very long because he was manifestly crackers. But when they transferred him to a loony

asylum he kicked up such a fuss that they didn't keep him there long either. Why? Because the authorities became convinced that he was normal. After they'd let him go he said to a newspaper reporter: 'My time in the mental ward was like Hell. Everyone else in there was real crazy, but the doctors saw that I wasn't like the rest of them. They saw I was normal. So they let me go.' I wasn't too upset about what this weirdo said. What really upset me was what the reporter said. He said the most distressing aspect of this strange and solitary cannibal was the fact that he really believed himself to be normal! Don't you see what I'm saying?

## CHAPTER NINE

And I wonder how they should have been together!

(T. S. Eliot, *La Figlia Che Piange*)

HE MADE his way from the dining room to the bar. The meal had been a lonely affair; but Morse was never too worried about periods of loneliness, and felt himself unable to appreciate the distinction that some folk made between solitude and loneliness. In any case, he'd enjoyed the meal. Venison, no less! He now ordered a pint :: Best Bitter and sat down, his back to the sea, with the current issue of *The Times*. He looked at his wrist-watch, wrote the time (8.21) in the small rectangle of space beside the crossword, and began.

At 8.35, as he struggled a little over the last two clues, he heard her voice:

'Not finished it yet?'

Morse felt a sudden rush of happiness.

'Mind if I join you?' She sat down beside him, to his right, on the wall-seat. 'I've ordered some coffee. Are you having any?'

'Er, no. Coffee's never figured all that prominently in my life.'

'Water neither, by the look of things.'

Morse turned towards her and saw she was smiling at him. 'Water's all right,' he admitted 'in moderation.'

'Not original!'

'No. Mark Twain.'

A young bow-tied waiter had brought the coffee, and she poured almost full cup before adding a little very thick cream; and Morse looked down at those slim fingers as she circled the spoon in a slow-motion, almost sensual stir.

'You got the paper?'

Morse nodded his gratitude. 'Yes.'

"Let me tell you something - I'm not even going to ask why you wanted it so badly.'

'Why not?'

'Well, for one thing, you told me in your note.'

'And for another?'

She hesitated now, and turned to look at him. 'Why don't you offer me a cigarette?'

Morse's new-found happiness scaled yet another peak.

'What's your name?' she asked.

'Morse. They, er, call me Morse.'

'Odd name! What's your surname?'

'That is my surname.'

'As well? Your name's Morse Morse? Like that man in Catch 22 isn't it? Major Major Major.'

'Didn't he have four Majors?'

'You read a lot?'

'Enough.'

'Did you know the Coleridge quotation? I could see you looking at the crossword last night.'

'Haven't you got the paper twisted between you and me?'

'I've got X-ray eyes.'

Morse looked at her eyes, and for a few seconds looked deeply into her eyes - and saw a hazel-green concoloration there, with sign now of any bloodshot webbing. I just happened to know the quote, yes.'

'Which was?'

'The answer was "sieve".'

'And the line goes?'

'Two lines actually, to make any sense of things:

"Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve, And Hope without an object cannot live." '

'You do read a lot.'

'What's your name?'

'Louisa.'

'And what do you do, Louisa?'

'I work for a model agency. No, that's wrong. I am a model agency.'

'Where are you from?'

'From a little village just south of Salisbury, along the Chalke Valley.'

Morse nodded vaguely. 'I've driven through that part once or twice. Combe Bissett? Near there, is it?'

'Quite near, yes. But what about you? What do you do?'

'I'm a sort of glorified clerk, really. I work in an office - nine-to-five man.'

"Whereabouts is that?'

'Oxford.'

'Lovely city!'

'You know Oxford?'

'Why don't you buy me a large brandy?' she asked softly in his ear.

Morse put the drinks on his room-bill and returned with one large brandy and one large malt Scotch. Several other couples were enjoying their liqueurs in that happily appointed bar, and Morse looked out from the window at the constantly whitening waves before placing the drinks side by side on the table.

'Cheers!'

'Cheers!'

'You're a liar,' she said.

The three words hit Morse like an uppercut, and he had no time to regain his balance before she continued, mercilessly: "You're a copper. You're a chief inspector. And judging from amount of alcohol you get through you're probably never in your office much after opening time.'

'Is it that obvious - I'm a copper, I mean?'

'Oh no! Not obvious at all. I just saw your name and address in the register and my husband - well, he happens to have heard of you.'

He says you're supposed to be a bit of a whizz-kid in the In the crime world. That's all.'

'Do I know your husband?'

'I very much doubt it.'

'He's not here-' 'What are you doing in Lyme?'

'Me? I dunno. Perhaps I'm looking for some lovely, lonely lady who wouldn't call me a liar even if she thought I was.'

'You deny it? You deny you're a copper?'

Morse shook his head. 'No. It's just that when you're on holiday, well, sometimes you want to get away from the work you do - and sometimes you tell a few lies, I suppose. Everyone tells a few lies occasionally.'

They do?

'Oh yes.'

'Everyone?'

Morse nodded. 'Including you.' He turned towards her again, but found himself unable to construe the confusing messages read there in her eyes.

'Go on,' she said quietly.

'I think you're a divorced woman having an affair with a married man who lives in Oxford. I think the pair of you occasionally get the opportunity of a weekend together. I think that when you do you need an accommodation address and that you use your own address, which is not in the Chalke Valley but in the Cathedra Close at Salisbury. I think you came here by coach on Friday afternoon and that your partner, who was probably at some conference or other in the area, was scheduled to get here at the same time as you. But he didn't show up. And since you'd already booked your double room you registered and took your stuff up to



your room, including a suitcase with the initials "C S O" on it. You suspected something had gone sadly wrong, but as yet you daren't use the phone to find out. You had no option but to wait. I think a call did come through eventually, explaining the situation and you were deeply disappointed and upset -upset enough to shed a tear or two. This morning you hired a taxi to take you to meet this fellow who had let you down, and I think you've spent the day together somewhere. You're back here now because you've booked the, weekend break anyway, and your partner probably gave you a cheque to cover the bill. You'll be leaving in the morning, hoping for better luck next time.'

Morse had finished -and there was a long silence between them during which he drained his whisky, she her brandy,

'Another?' asked Morse.

'Yes. But I'll get them. The cheque he gave me was more than generous.' The voice was matter-of-fact, harder now, and Morse knew that the wonderful magic had faded. When she returned with the drinks, she changed her place and sat primly opposite him.

'Would you believe me if I said the suitcase I brought with me belongs to my mother, whose name is Cassandra Osborne?'

'No,' said Morse. For a few seconds he thought he saw a sign of a gentle amusement in her eyes, but it was soon gone.

'What about this - this "married man who lives in Oxford"?''

'Oh, I know all about him.'

You what?' Involuntarily her voice had risen to a falsetto squeak, and two or three heads had turned in her direction.

'I rang up the Thames Valley Police. If you put any car number through the computer there -'

'- you get the name and address of the owner in about ten seconds.'

'About two seconds,' amended Morse. 'And you did that?' 'I did that.'

'God! You're a regular shit, aren't you?' Her eyes blazed with anger now.

'S'funny, though,' said Morse, ignoring the hurt. 'I know his name - but I still don't know

yours.' 'Louisa, I told you.'

'No. I think not. Once you'd got to play the part of Mrs Something Hardinge, you liked the idea of "Louisa". Why not? You may not know all that much about Coleridge. But about Hardy? That's different. You remembered that when Hardy was a youth he fell in love with a girl who was a bit above him in class and wealth and privilege, and so he tried to forget her. In fact he spent all the rest of his life trying to forget her.'

She was looking down at the table as Morse went gently on: 'Hardy never really spoke to her. But when he was an old man he used to go and stand over her unmarked grave in Stinsford churchyard.'

It was Morse's turn now to look down at the table

'Would you like some more coffee, madame?' The waiter smiled :ely and sounded a pleasant young chap. But 'madame' shook -- nead, stood up, and prepared to leave

'Claire - Claire Osborne - that's my name.'

'Well, thanks again - for the paper, Claire.'

'That's all right.' Her voice was trembling slightly and her eyes ; suddenly moist with tears.

'Shall I see you for breakfast?' asked Morse.

'No. I'm leaving early.'

'Like this morning.'

'Like this morning.'

'I see,' said Morse.

'Perhaps you see too much.'

'Perhaps I don't see enough.'

'Goodnight - Morse.'

'Goodnight. Goodnight, Claire.'

When an hour and several drinks later Morse finally decided to retire, he found it difficult to concentrate on anything else except taking one slightly swaying stair at a time. On the second floor, Room 14 faced him at the landing; and if only a line of light had shown itself at the foot of that door, he told himself that he might have knocked gently and faced the prospect of the wrath to come. But there was no light.

Claire Osborne herself lay awake into the small hours, the duvet kicked aside, her hands behind her head, seeking to settle her restless eyes; seeking to fix them on some putative point about six inches in front of her nose. Half her thoughts were still with the conceited, civilized, ruthless, gentle, boozy, sensitive man with whom she had spent the earlier hours of that evening; the other half were with Alan Hardinge, Dr Alan Hardinge, fellow of Lonsdale College, Oxford, whose young daughter, Sarah, had been killed by an articulated lorry as she had cycled down Cumnor Hill on her way to school the previous morning.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

Mrs Kidgerbury was the oldest inhabitant of Kentish Town, I believe, who

went out charing, but was too feeble to execute her conceptions of that art

(Charles Dickens, David Copperfield)

With A sort of expectorant 'phoo', followed by a cushioned 'phlop', Chief Superintendent Strange sat his large self down opposite Chief Inspector Harold Johnson. It was certainly not that he enjoyed walking up the stairs, for he had no pronounced adaptability for such exertions; it was just that he had promised his very slim and very solicitous wife that he would try to get in a bit of exercise at office wherever possible. The trouble lay in the fact that he usually too feeble in both body and spirit to translate such resolve into execution. But not on the morning of Tuesday, 30 June 1992, four days before Morse had booked into the Bay Hotel .

..

THE Chief Constable had returned from a fortnight's furlough the previous day, and his first job had been to look through the correspondence which his very competent secretary had been unable, or unauthorized, to answer. The letter containing the 'Swedish Maiden' verses had been in the in-tray (or so she thought) about a week. It had come (she thought she remembered) in a cheap brown envelope addressed (she did almost remember this) to 'Chief Constable Smith (?)'; but the cover had been thrown away -sorry! -and the stanzas themselves had lingered there, wasting as it were their sweetness on the desert air - until Monday the 29<sup>th</sup>.

The Chief Constable himself had felt unwilling to apportion blame: five stanzas by a minor poet named Austin were not exactly the pretext for declaring a state of national emergency, were they? YET THE 'Swedish' of the first line combined with the 'maiden' of penultimate line had inevitably rung the bell, and so he had in turn rung Strange, who in turn had reminded the CC that it was DCI Johnson who had been - was - in charge of the earlier investigations.

A photocopy of the poem was waiting on his desk that day when] Johnson returned from lunch.

It had been the following morning, however, when things had really started to happen. This time, certainly, it was a cheap brown

envelope, addressed to 'Chief Constable Smith (?)', Kidlington Police, Kidlington' (nothing else on the cover), with a Woodstock! postmark, and a smudged date that could have been '27 June' that was received in the post room at HQ, and duly placed with the CC's other mail. The letter was extremely brief:

Why are you doing nothing about my letter?

Karin Eriksson

The note-paper clearly came from the same wad as that used for the first letter: 'Recycled Paper -OXFAM • Oxford • Britain' printed along the bottom. There was every sign too that the note was written on the same typewriter, since the four middle characters of 'letter' betrayed the same imperfections as those observable in the Swedish Maiden verses.

This time the CC summoned Strange immediately to his office

'Prints?' suggested Strange, looking up from the envelope and note-paper which lay on the table before him.

'Waste o' bloody time! The envelope? The postman who collected it -the sorter -the postman who delivered it - the post room people here -the girl who brought it round -my secretary . . .'

'You, sir?'

'And me, yes.'

'What about the letter itself?'

'You can try if you like.'

'I'll get Johnson on to it -'

'I don't want Johnson. He's no bloody good with this sort of case. I want Morse on it.'

'He's on holiday.'

'First I've heard of it!'

'You've been on holiday, sir.'

'It'll have to be Johnson then. But for Christ's sake tell him to get off his arse and actually do something!'

For a while Strange sat thinking silently. Then he said, 'I've got a bit of an idea. Do you remember that correspondence they had in The Times a year or so back?'

'The Irish business - yes.'

'I was just thinking - thinking aloud, sir - that if you were to ring The Times-'

"Me? What's wrong with you ringing 'em?'

Strange said nothing.

'Look! I don't care what we do so long as we do something quick!'

Strange struggled out of his seat.

'How does Morse get on with Johnson?' asked the CC.

'He doesn't.'

'Where is Morse going, by the way?'

'Lyme Regis - you know, where some of the scenes in Persuasion set.'

'Ah.' The CC looked suitably blank as the Chief Superintendent lumbered towards the door.

'There we are then,' said Strange. 'That's what I reckon we ought to do. What do you say? Cause

a bit of a stir, wouldn't it? Cause a bit of interest?'

Johnson nodded. 'I like it. Will you ring The Times, sir?'

'What's wrong with you ringing 'em?'

'Do you happen to know-?'

'You -can -obtain -Directory -Enquiries,' intoned Strange stically,  
'by dialling one

nine-two.' Johnson kept his lips tightly together as Strange  
continued: 'And while I'm here

you might as well remind me about the case. All right'

So Johnson reminded him of the case, drawing together the  
threads of the story with considerably more skill than Strange had  
thought him capable of.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

Nec scit qua sit iter (He knows not which is the way to take) (Ovid,  
Metamorphoses II)

KARIN ERIKSSON had been a 'missing person' enquiry a year ago  
when her rucksack had been found; she was a 'missing person  
enquiry' now. She was not the subject of a murder enquiry for  
simple reason that it was most unusual - and extremely tricy - to  
mount a murder enquiry without any suspicion of foul play, with  
no knowledge of any motive, and above all without body.

So, what was known about Miss Eriksson? Her mother had run a  
small guest-house in Uppsala, but sc after the disappearance of  
her daughter had moved back to roots -to the outskirts of  
Stockholm. Karin, the middle of three daughters, had just  
completed a secretarial course, and had passed her final  
examination, if not with distinction at least with a reasonable hope  
of landing a decent job. She was, as all agreed, of the classic  
Nordic type, with long blonde hair and a bosom which liable to  
monopolize most men's attention when first they met her. In the  
summer of 1990 she had made her way to the Holy Land without  
much money, but also without much trouble it appeared until  
reaching her destination, where she may or may not have been

the victim of attempted rape by an Israeli soldier. In 1991 she had determined to embark on another trip overseas; been determined too, by all accounts, to keep well clear of the military wherever she went, and had attended a three-month martial arts course in Uppsala, there showing an aptitude and perseverance which had not always been apparent in her secretarial studies. In any case, she was a tallish (5 foot 8½ inches), large-boned, athletic young lady, who could take fairly good care of herself, thank you very much.

The records showed that Karin had flown to Heathrow on Wednesday, 3 July 1991, with almost £200 in one of her pockets, a multi-framed assemblage of hiking-gear, and with the address of a superintendent in a YWCA hostel near King's Cross. A few days in London had apparently dissipated a large proportion of her English currency; and fairly early in the morning of Sunday, 7 July, she had taken the tube (perhaps) to Paddington, from where (perhaps) she had made her way up to the A40, M40 -towards Oxford. The statement made by the YWCA superintendent firmly suggested that from what Karin had told her she would probably be heading -in the long run - for a distant relative living mid-Wales.

In all probability K. would have been seen on one of the feeder roads to the A40 at about 10

a.m. or so that day. She would have been a distinctive figure: longish straw-coloured hair, wearing a pair of faded-blue jeans, raggedly split at the knees à la mode. But particularly noticeable - this from several witnesses -would have been the yellow and blue Swedish flag, some 9 inches by 6 inches, stitched across the main back pocket of her rucksack; and around her neck (always) a silk, tasselled scarf in the same national colours - sunshine and sky.

Two witnesses had come forward with fairly positive sightings of a woman, answering Karin's description, trying to hitch a lift between the Headington and the Banbury Road roundabouts in Oxford. And one further witness, a youth waiting for a bus at the top of the Banbury Road in Oxford, thought he remembered seeing her walking fairly purposefully down towards Oxford that



day. The time? About noon -certainly! -since he was just off for a drink at the Eagle and Child in St Giles'. But more credence at the time was given to a final witness, .a solicitor driving to see invalid mother in Yarnton, who thought he could well have her walking along Sunderland Avenue, the hornbeam-lined road linking the Banbury Road and the Woodstock Road roundabouts.

At this point Johnson looked down at his records, took out a amateurishly drawn diagram, and handed it across to Strange.

'That's what would have faced her, sir -if we can believe she even got as far as the Woodstock Road roundabout.'



With little enthusiasm, Strange looked down at the diagram and Johnson continued his story.

Karin could have gone straight over, of course - straight along the A40, a road where it would be very much easier for a hitchhiker to get a lift than along the motorways and dual-carriageways she'd already negotiated successfully. In addition, the A40 would lead pretty directly towards the address of her third cousin. Or whatever, near Llandovery. But it had not seemed to the detectives who considered the matter that she had taken the 'Witney' option -or the 'Wolvercote' - or the 'City Centre' one; but had take the road that led to Woodstock . . .

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

Sigh out a lamentable tale of things, Done long ago, and ill done  
(John Ford, The Lover's Melancholy)

At ABOUT 7.15 (Johnson continued) on the sunny Tuesday morning of 9 July 1991, George Daley, of 2 Blenheim Villas, Begbroke, Oxon had taken his eight-year-old King Charles spaniel for an early-morning walk along the slip-road beside the Royal Sun, a road-side ale-house on the northern stretch of the A44, a mile or so on the Oxford side of Woodstock. At the bottom of a hawthorn hedge almost totally concealed by rank cow-parsley, Daley had spotted -as he claimed -a splash of bright colour; and as he ventured down, and near, he had all but trodden on a camera before seeing the scarlet rucksack.

Of course at this stage there had been no evidence of foul play - still wasn't -and it was the camera that had claimed most of Daley's attention. He'd promised a camera to his son Philip, a lad just coming up for his sixteenth birthday; and the camera he'd found a heavy, aristocratic-looking thing, was a bit too much of a temptation. Both the rucksack and the camera he'd taken home, where cursorily that morning, in more detail later that evening, he and his wife Margaret had considered things.

'Finders keepers', they'd been brought up to accept. And well, the rucksack clearly -and specifically -belonged to someone else, but the camera had no name on it, had it? For all they knew, it had no connection at all with the rucksack. So they'd taken out the film, which seemed to be fully used up anyway, and thrown it on the fire. Not a crime, was it? Sometimes even the police -Daley suggested -weren't all that sure what should be entered in the crime figures. If a bike got stolen, it was a crime all right. But if the owner could be persuaded that the bike hadn't really been stolen at all -just inadvertently 'lost', say -then it didn't count as a crime at all, now did it?

'Was he an ex-copper, this fellow Daley?' asked Strange, nodding his appreciation of the point. Johnson grinned, but shook his head and continued.

The wife, Margaret Daley, felt a bit guilty about hanging on to the rucksack, and according to Daley persuaded him to drop it at Kidlington the next day, Wednesday -originally asserting that he'd found it that same morning. But he hadn't really got his story

together, and it was soon pretty clear that the man wasn't a very good liar; and it wasn't long before he changed his story.

The rucksack itself? Apart from the pocket-buttons rusting a bit, it seemed reasonably new, containing, presumably, all the young woman's travelling possessions, including a passport which identified its owner as one Karin Eriksson, from an address in Uppsala Sweden. Nothing, it appeared, had been tampered with overmuch by the Daleys, but the contents had proved of only limited interest the usual female toiletries, including toothpaste, Tampax, lipstick eye-shadow, blusher, comb, nail-file, tweezers, and white tissue an almost full packet of Marlboro cigarettes with a cheap 'throw-away' lighter; a letter, in Swedish, from a boyfriend, dated two months earlier, proclaiming (as was later translated) a love that was fully prepared to wait until eternity but which would also appreciate a further rendezvous a little earlier; a slim money wallet, containing no credit cards or travellers' cheques -just five ten-pound notes (newish but not consecutively numbered); a book of second-class English postage-stamps; a greyish plastic mac meticulously folded; a creased postcard depicting Velasquez's 'Rokeby Venus' on one side, and the address of the Welsh relative on the other; two clean (cleanish) pairs of pants; one faded-blue dress; three creased blouses, black, white, and darkish red . . .

'Get on with it,' mumbled Strange.

Well, Interpol were contacted, and of course the Swedish police A distraught mother, by phone from Uppsala, had told them that it was very unusual for Karin not to keep her family informed where she was and what she was up to - as she had done from London the previous week.

A poster ('Have you seen this young woman?') displaying blown-up copy of the passport photograph had been printed, and seen by some of the citizens of Oxford and its immediate environs in buses, youth clubs, information offices, employment agencies those sorts of places.

'And that's when these people came forward, these witnesses?' interrupted Strange.

'That's it, sir.'

'And the fellow you took notice of was the one who thought he saw her in Sunderland Avenue.'

'He was a very good witness. Very good.'

'Mm! I don't know. A lovely leggy blonde -well-tanned, well-exposed, eh, Johnson? Standing there on the grass verge facing the traffic....Bit odd, isn't it? You'd've thought the fellow would've rembered her for certain - that's all I'm saying. Some of us still have the occasional erotic day-dream, y'know.'

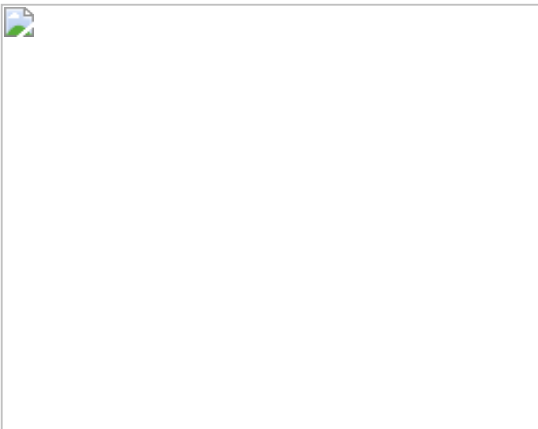
'That's what Morse said.'

'Did he now!'

'He said even if most of us were only going as far as Woodstock we'd have taken her on to Stratford, if that's what she wanted.'

'He'd have taken her to Aberdeen,' growled Strange.

The next thing (Johnson continued his story) had been the discovery, in the long grass about twenty yards from where the rucksack had been found - probably fallen out of one of the pockets a slim little volume titled A Birdwatchers' Guide. Inside was a sheet of white paper, folded vertically and seemingly acting as a mark, on which the names of ten birds had been written in it capitals, with a pencilled tick against seven of them:



The lettering matched the style and slope of the few scraps of writing found in the other documents, and the easy conclusion was that Karin Eriksson had been a keen ornithologist, probably buying the book after arriving in London and trying to add to her list of sightings some of the rarer species which could be seen during English summers. The names of the birds were written English and there was only the one misspelling: the 'breaded tit' - an interesting variety of the 'bearded plaice' spotted fairly frequently in English restaurants. (It had been the pedantic Morse; who had made this latter point.)

Even more interesting, though, had been the second enclosure within the pages: a thin yellow leaflet, folded this time across middle, announcing a pop concert in the grounds of Blenheim Palace on Monday, 8 July -the day before the rucksack was found: 8 p.m.-11.30 p.m., admission (ticket only) £4.50.

That was it. Nothing else really. Statements taken - enquires made - searches organized in the grounds of Blenheim Palace but...

'How much did Morse come into all this?' asked a frowning Strange.

Johnson might have known he'd ask it, and he knew he might as well come clean.

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

He that reads and grows no wiser seldom suspects his own deficiency, but

complains of hard words and obscure sentences, and asks why books are

written which cannot be understood

(Samuel Johnson, The Idler)

THE TRUTH was that Morse had not figured on the scene at all during the first few days of the case -for it was not a case of homicide; and (as was to be hoped) still wasn't. Yet the follow-up

investigations had been worrying, especially of course the steadily growing and cumulative evidence that Karin Eriksson had been a responsible young woman who had never previously drifted into the drink-drugs-sex-scene.

Only after the case had grown a little cold had Morse spent a couple of hours one afternoon with Johnson, in that late July, now a year ago -before being side-tracked into a squalid domestic murder out on the Cowley Road.

'I reckon he thought it all a bit - a bit of a joke, sir, quite honestly.'

'Joke? Joke? This is no bloody joke, Johnson! Like as not, we be opening a couple of extra lines on the switchboard once bloody newspapers get hold of it. It'll be like an air disaster! And if the public come up with some brighter ideas than the police . . .'

Johnson gently reminded him: 'But it's your idea, sir - this business of sending the Letters to The Times'

'What did you mean - about Morse?' asked Strange, ignoring criticism.

'What I meant, sir, is that he, well, he only skipped over the details with me, and he sort of said the first things that came into his head, really. I don't think he had time to think about things much'

'He'd have ideas though, wouldn't he, Morse? Always did have. Even if he'd been on a case a couple of minutes. Usually the wrong ideas of course, but . . .'

'All I'm saying is that he didn't seem to take the case at all seriously. He was sort of silly about things, really -'

Strange's voice sounded suddenly thunderous: 'Look here. Johnson! Morse may be an idiot, you're right. But he's never been a fool. Let's get that straight!'

For Johnson, the differentiation between what he had hitherto regarded as virtual synonyms -'idiot' and 'fool' -was clearly

beyond his etymological capacities; and he frowned a guarded puzzlement as his superior officer continued:

'Some people are occasionally right for the wrong reasons. But, Morse? He's more often than not wrong for the right reasons. The right reasons . . . you understand me? So even if he sometimes drinks too much . . .'

Johnson looked down at the file in front of him: he knew, alas exactly what Strange was

saying. 'Would you rather Morse took over the case, sir?'

'Yes, I think I would,' said Strange. 'So would the CC, if you must know,' he added cruelly.

'So when does he get back from leave . . . ?'

Strange sighed deeply. 'Not soon enough. Let's see what happens with this newspaper angle.'

'He's pretty sure to see it - if they print it.'

'What? Morse? Nonsense! I've never seen him reading anything he just spends half an hour on the crossword, that's all.'

'Ten minutes - last time I watched him,' said Johnson honestly if somewhat grudgingly.

'Wasted his life, Morse has,' confided Strange, after a pause.

'Should've got married, you mean?'

Strange began to extricate himself from his chair. I wouldn't go as far as that. Ridiculous institution - marriage! Don't you think so?'

Johnson, himself having married only six months previously forebore any direct response, as Strange finally brought his vertebrae to the vertical, from which vantage point he looked down on the papers that Johnson had been consulting.

'Isn't that Morse's writing?' he queried presbyopically.

Yes, it was Morse's handwriting; and doubtless Johnson would have preferred Strange not to have seen it. But at least it would rove his point. So he picked out the sheet, and handed it over.

'Mm.' Chief Superintendent Strange held the piece of paper at arm's length, surveying its import. Unlike Morse, he was an extremely rapid reader; and after only ten seconds or so he handed back to Johnson: 'See what you mean!'

Johnson, in turn, looked down again at the sheet Morse had left - the one he'd found on his desk that morning a year ago mow, when Morse had been transferred to what had appeared more urgent enquiries:

I never got to grips with the case as you know but I'd have liked answers to the following

half-dozen qq:

- a) Had Daley or his missus owned a camera themselves?
- b) What was the weather like on Tuesday 9th July?
- c) 'It's striped: what about ze panties?' (5)
- d) What's the habitat of 'Dendrocopus Minor'?
- e) What beer do they serve at the Royal Sun (or at the White Hart!)?
- f) What's the dog's name?

Strange now lumbered to the door. 'Don't ignore all this bloody nonsense, Johnson. That's what I'm telling you. Don't take too much notice of it; but don't ignore it, understand?'

For the second time within a short while the etymological distinction between a couple of unequivocal synonyms had



completely escaped Inspector Johnson's reasonably bright but comparatively limited brain.

'As you say, sir.'

"And, er, and one other thing . . . the wife's just bought a new dog -little King Charles, lovely thing! Two hundred pounds it cost. Pisses everywhere, of course -and worse! But he's, you know, he's always glad to see you. More than the wife sometimes, eh? It's just that we've only had the bloody thing a fortnight, and we haven't christened it.'

'The dog's name was "Mycroft'. Good name - be a good name for your dog, sir.'

'Imaginative, yes! I'll, er, mention it to the missus, Johnson. Just one little problem, though . . .'

Johnson raised his rather bushy eyebrows.

'Yes. She's a she. Johnson!'

'Oh.' 'Anything else Morse said?' pursued Strange.

'Well, yes. He, er, thought - he said he had a gut-feeling-'

'Huh!'

' - that we'd been searching for a body in the wrong place.'

'In Blenheim, you mean?'

Johnson nodded. 'He thought we ought to have been looking in Wytham Woods.'

'Yes. I remember him saying that.'

'Only after we'd drawn a blank in Blenheim, though.'

'Better wise after the event than never.'

Augh, shut up! Johnson was becoming a little weary of all the innuendos: 'If you recall, sir, it wasn't just Morse who was in favour of a wider operation. But we hadn't got the personnel available for a search of Wytham Woods. You said so. I came to ask you myself.'

Strange was stung into retaliation. 'Look, Johnson! You find me a body and I'll find you all the bloody personnel you need, all right?'

It was the chicken-and-egg business all over again, and Johnson would have said so -but Strange was already guiding his bulk downstairs, via the hand-rail on the HQ wall.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

Only the keeper sees

That, where the ring-dove broods.

And the badgers roll at ease,

There was once a road through the woods

(Rudyard Kipling, *The Way Through the Woods*),

IT WAS to be Morse's last breakfast at the Bay Hotel, that morning Monday, 6 July 1992, six days after the long meeting just recorded between Strange and Johnson at Kidlington HQ in Oxfordshire. He would have wished to stay a further couple of days -but there were no vacancies; and, as the proprietor reminded him, he'd already had more than his share of luck.

As he waited for his mixed grill he re-read the article, again high profile page-one news

the article promised the previous Friday by Howard Phillipson,  
literary editor of *The Times*:

A preliminary analysis

INTEREST in the 'Swedish Maiden' verses printed in these columns last week (Friday, July 3) has been sweeping this newspaper's

offices, but I am myself now somewhat more diffident than I originally was about solving the fascinating riddle-me-ree presented by the five stanzas. I had earlier assumed that there might well be sufficient 'internal logic' in the information received by the Thames Valley Police to come to firm conclusions. I am no longer so strongly of this opinion.

Only with considerable hesitation therefore do I offer my own amateurish analysis of the riddle, in the fairly certain knowledge that very soon the cryptologists and cabbalists, criminologists and cranks, will be making their own considerably more subtle interpretations of these tantalizing lines.

For what it is worth, however, I suggest that the parameters of the problem may be set, albeit rather vaguely. In modern mathematics (as I understand the situation) pupils are asked, before tackling any problem: 'What roughly do you think the answer might be? What sort of answer might you logically expect?' If, say, the problem involves the speed of a supersonic jet flying the Atlantic, the answer is perhaps unlikely to be 10 m.p.h., and any pupil coming up with such an improbable answer is advised to look back through his calculations and find out where he might have dropped a couple of noughts. If we are set to discover the time taken by those famous taps to fill the family tub, the answer is still rather more likely to be ten minutes than ten hours. Permit me then to make a few general comments on what would appear to be the sort of solution we might expect. (The verses are reprinted on page 2.)

Clearly the poem is cast in a 'sylvan' setting: we have 'woodman'; 'stream'; 'riding' (sic!); 'Thyme flow'ring'; 'trapped'; 'hunted deer'; etc. There will be no prizes, I realize, for such an analysis, but the neglect of the obvious is always the beginning of unwisdom.

The setting of some wood or forest therefore must be our *donné*, and my suggestion to the Thames Valley CID would be to concentrate their doubtless limited resources of manpower within two of the local areas which seem to hold the greatest promise: the forested area around Blenheim Palace, and the Wytham Woods

-the latter becoming increasingly famous for its fox and badger research.

Let us now turn to the more specific import of the stanzas. The speaker of the poem, the 'persona', is clearly no longer a living being. Yet her dramatic message is quite unequivocal: she has been murdered; she has been drowned (or perhaps just dumped) in one of the lakes or streams situated in the wood(s); if such waters are searched and dredged her corpse will be found; finally the police may have been (somewhat?) remiss in not pursuing their enquiries with rather greater perseverance.

What can be gathered from the nature of the verses themselves? Their composer is certainly no Her-rick or Housman, yet in terms of technical prosody the writer is more than competent. Vocabulary ('tegument', 'azured', etc.) is more redolent of the Senior Common Room than the Saloon Bar; and the versification, punctuation, and diction, all point to a literate and well-read man - or woman!

Can anything more specific be said about the writer? For some while, as I read and re-read the verses, I toyed with the idea of their author being a relative of the dead girl. The reason for my thinking was the continued emphasis, throughout the poem, of the 'find me' motif; and I was reminded of the Homeric heroes of the Iliad where death in battle was a fully expected and wholly honourable end -but where the most terrible fate of all was to die unrecognized, unburied, unfound, in some unknown and far-off land. Is the poem then above all a desperate cry for the Christian burial of the body? This would be most understandable. We have seen in recent years so many tragic instances (in the Middle East, for example) where the simple return of a dead body has paved the way for some peace initiative.

But I no longer believe this to be the case. My firm conviction now is that the verses have been sent to the police by a person for whom the period -now a year -between the murder of Karin Eriksson and the present time has become an intolerable Hell. A person who is very near to breaking point. A person who wishes the crime at last to be uncovered, and who is now prepared to pay the penalty. In short, the murderer!

Dare I go any further? I learned two further (hitherto unpublished) facts from Detective Chief Inspector Johnson. First, that the letter-writer was able to spell, correctly, the not very easy or obvious 'Eriksson'; second, that the writer was aware of the previous Chief Constable's surname, but not that of the current incumbent. On the old adage then that one might just as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, I reckon the murderer to be male; to be between thirty and thirty-five years old; to have a degree in English literature; to have lived until about six or nine months ago in Oxfordshire; to have revisited the scene of his crime during the last month, say, whilst staying at one of the more upmarket hostelries in Woodstock, Oxon.

I rest my case, m'lud! 'Hi!' she said. 'Mind if I join you?'

'Please do,' said Morse, carefully mounting the last segment of his fried egg on the last square of his fried bread.

'You ever read about cholesterol?' Her voice was very cultured, the two 't's of her simple question affectedly exaggerated.

Morse swallowed his latest mouthful and looked at the slim, expensively dressed woman who now sat opposite him, ordering black coffee and a croissant - nothing more.

'They say we've all got to die of something.' He tried to make it sound reasonably cheerful.

'Ridiculous attitude!' The lips, expertly outlined in, some pale-crimson shade, looked severe, yet the grey eyes in the delicate, oval face might almost have been mocking him.

'I suppose it is,' he said.

'You're overweight anyway, aren't you?'

'I suppose so,' he repeated lamely.

'You'll have high blood pressure in your mid-fifties -unless you're there now? Then you'll probably have a stroke in your early sixties; and like as not die of a heart attack before you're seventy.'

She had already drained her coffee cup, and held up an elegant, imperious hand to the waitress. 'What's your job?'

Morse sighed, and considered the last piece of toast in the rack. 'I'm a policeman, and I come from Oxford, and I'm on holiday here until about ten o'clock this morning. I'm single and maybe I'm not much of a catch, but if I'd known I was going-'

'-going to meet a beautiful girl like me! Surely you can original than that?' The eyes were mocking him again.

Morse took the toast and started buttering it. 'No, I can't, can't do much better than that.'

'Perhaps you underrate yourself.'

'What about you? What do you do?'

'Why don't you tell me. You're a policeman, you say?'

For half a minute or so Morse looked at her, cocking his head, slightly to the right. Then he gave his judgement: 'You're a beautician, possibly a dietitian too, which you probably spell with a "t" and not a "c"; you're in your late twenties, and you went to school at Cheltenham Ladies'; you're married but you sometimes leave off your wedding ring -like now; you're fond of pets but you tend to think children are something of an exaggerated pastime. And you come for a walk with me along the prom, I'll try to fill in a few more of the details as we go along.'

'That's much better.'

'Well? How did I do?'

She smiled and shook her head. 'Is your name Sherlock Holmes?'

'Morse.'

'Am I that transparent?'

'No. I, er, saw you come in with your husband last night - when you went straight to bed and

he-' 'He stayed at the bar!'

'We had one or two drinks together, and I asked him who the beautiful woman was-'

'And he said, "That's not a beautiful woman: that's my wife!"?

'Something like that.'

'And he talked about me?'

'He talked nicely about you.'

'He was drunk.'

'He's sleeping it off?' Morse pointed to the ceiling. She nodded her dark curls. 'So he won't mind much if you take me on that walk, will he, Mr Morse? When you've finished your toast, of course. And wouldn't you spell dietitian with a "t"?''

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

At the very smallest wheel of our reasoning it is possible for a handful of

questions to break the bank of our answers

(Antonio Machado, Juan de Mairena)

ON THE same morning that Morse was packing his single suitcase (1On the day of their departure guests are respectfully requested ' vacate their rooms by 10.30 a.m.')

Sergeant Lewis knocked on Johnson's door, soon seating himself opposite the chief inspector, and beside Sergeant Wilkins.

'Good of you to spare a few minutes.'

'If I can help in any way ...' said Lewis warily.

'You know Morse better than most.'

Nobody knows him all that well.'

'You've got a reasonable idea how his mind works though.'

'He's got a strange sort of mind-'

'Not many'd disagree with you.'

'He's good at some things.'

'Such as?'

'He's not bad at catching murderers for a start.'

And you do realize the odds are we're trying to catch another murderer now, don't you, Sergeant?'

'If it is murder.'

'Did Morse think it was murder?'

'As I remember, sir, he was only on it with you for a day or so.'

'Less than that.' (Wilkins had made his first contribution.)

'You're following this - this newspaper business, I presume, Lewis?'

'Everybody reads The Times before the Sun now.'

'What do you make of this?' Johnson handed a photocopy of Morse's 'half-dozen qq.' across the desk.

Lewis looked down at the list and smiled. 'Bit of a joke - some of this, isn't it?'

'Take my advice, Lewis, and don't try telling that to the Super'

'I don't know the answer to any of 'em,' admitted Lewis, 'except (e) - well, part of (e). It's a "Morrell's" pub, the Royal Sun. I brought quite a few pints there, I reckon.'



'What, for Morse, you mean?'

'Who else?'

'But has he ever bought you any, Lewis? That's the real question eh, Wilkins?'

The two men sniggered. And suddenly Lewis hated them both

'What about the White Hart?' continued Johnson.

'Lot of "White Harts" about.'

'Yes, we know that!' Johnson gestured to Wilkins, the latter now reading from his notes: 'Headington, Marston, Wolvercoat, Wytham, Minster Lovell, Eynsham . . .'

'I expect Morse could probably add to the list,' ventured Johnson.

Lewis, determining henceforth to be as minimally helpful possible, made only a brief comment:

'She'd've got past the first two.'

Johnson nodded. 'What about Eynsham and Minster Love just off the A40, both of them -if she ever travelled along A40, that is.'

Lewis said nothing.

'What about the other two: Wolvercote and Wytham? Which would you put your money on?' 'Wytham,

I suppose.'

'Why's that?'

'The woods there - easy enough to hide a body.'

'Did you know that Morse asked the Chief Super about a search of Wytham Woods last year?'

Lewis did, yes. 'Only after the search in Blenheim didn't come up with anything.'

'Do you know how big Wytham Woods is, man?'

Lewis had a good idea, yes. But he merely shrugged shoulders.

'Why would Morse be interested in the dog?'

'Don't know. He told me once he'd never had any pets when he was a lad.'

'Perhaps he should get one now. Lots of bachelors have dogs

'You must suggest it to him, sir,' replied Lewis, with a note confidence in his voice, and a strange exhilaration flooding his limbs, for he suddenly realized that it was Johnson who was on defensive here, not himself. They were trying to pick his Lewis's) brains because they were envious of his relationship with Morse!

'What about the camera?' continued Johnson.

'You can ask the Daleys, can't you? If they're still there.'

'Odd question though, wouldn't you say?'

'I just don't know, sir. I think Morse told me he had a "brownie" given him once, but he said he never really understood how to work it.'

Sitting back in an almost relaxed manner now, Lewis looked down at the questions again. 'Should be easy to check on (b) - about the weather . . .'

Again Johnson waved a hand, and Wilkins consulted his notes according to Radio Oxford . . . the ninth of July . . . "Dry, sunny, seventy two to seventy-four degrees Fahrenheit; outlook settled; possibility of some overnight mist".'

'Nice. warm day, then,' said Lewis blandly.'

'What about (c)?'

'Crossword clue, sir. He's pretty hot on crosswords.'

'That's the answer?'

'No good asking me. Sometimes I can't even do the Mirror coffee-one.'

' "Ze-bra" - that's the answer.'

'Really? Well that's another one crossed off.'

'What about this "Dendrocopus Minor"? There was a note of exasperation in Johnson's voice

now. 'Pass' said Lewis with a gentle smile.

'For Christ's sake, man, we're on a potential murder enquiry - not a Bloody pub-quiz Don't you realize that? As a matter of fact it's the Lesser something bloody Woodpecker!'

'We learn something new every day.'

'Yes we do, Sergeant. And I'll tell you something else, if you like. It's habitat is woodlands or parklands and there are a few nesting in Wytham!'

'Lewis's new-found confidence was starting to ebb away as Johnson glared at him aggressively. 'You don't seem all that anxious to help us, Sergeant, do you? So let me just tell you why I asked along here. As you probably know, we're starting searching Blenheim all over again today, and we're going to search search until we're blue in the bloody face, OK? But if we still don't find anything we're going to hand over to Morse -and to you, Sergeant. I just thought you might like to know what we're all against, see?'

Lewis was conscious of a sinking sense of humiliation. 'I I-didn't know that, sir.'

'Why should you? They don't tell even you everything, do they'

'Why might they be taking you off?' asked Lewis slowly.

'They -"they" -are taking me off because they don't think I'm any fucking good,' said Johnson bitterly as he rose to his feet 'That's why!'

## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

Between 1871 and 1908 he published twenty volumes of verse, of little merit ('Alfred Austin', The Oxford Companion to English Literature, edited by Margaret Drabble)

MORSE was spending the last three days of his West Country holiday at the King's Arms in Dorchester (Dorchester, Dorset). Here he encountered neither models nor beauticians; but at last he began to feel a little reluctant about returning to Oxford. On the Wednesday he had explored Hardy's Dorchester on foot (!) a.m., and spent the whole p.m. in the Dorset County Museum. Nostalgic, all of it. And when finally he returned to 'the chief hotel in Casterbridge' he sat drinking his beer in the bar before dinner • sith the look of a man who was almost at ease with life.

On the Thursday morning he drove out through the countryside that provided much of the setting for Tess of the d'Urbervilles, along the A352 to the east of Dorchester, following the Vale of the Great Dairies, past Max Gate and Talbothays towards Wool. As he was driving through Moreton, he wondered whether there was any follow-up to the Phillipson analysis (there had been no mention in the Tuesday or Wednesday editions), and he stopped and bought the last copy of The Times from the village newsagent's. The answer was yes -yes, there was; and he sat for a while in the sunshine beside the wall of the cemetery containing the grave of Lawrence of Arabia, reading the long letter which (as with succeeding letters) now found its place naturally in the newspaper's correspondence columns:

From Professor (Emeritus) Rene Gray Sir, My mind, doubtless like the minds of many of your regular readers, has been much exercised these past few days following the publication (July 3) of

the letter received by the Thames Valley Police. I beg the courtesy of your columns to make one or two observations.

This is not a poem by Alfred Austin, though the words 'A. Austin' appear beneath it. The name 'Austin' does not seem to refer to a make of motor car: 'A'-registration Austins date from 198384, and there is no resemblance between this date and those given in brackets. The dates given are not Austin the poet's dates. He was born in 1835, and died in 1913. There is a remote possibility that the last two digits of his birth-date have been transposed for some reason, but the death-date is plainly wrong. Dying in 1913, he was 78 years old at the time of his death. By a strange coincidence the transposition of these digits gives us the '87' which is written here. I conclude that the dates are not all they seem, and most likely constitute the key to the cypher.

The figures do not appear to give geographical co-ordinates. They do not match the format of Ordnance Survey co-ordinates, and they are not co-ordinates of latitude and longitude, since Great Britain lies between the 50th and 60th lines of latitude and between the longitudes 2°E and 10°W. We are left with six digits which somehow must give the clue to the interpretation of the words of the message.

I have not been able to work out the cypher. I have tried the first word, followed by the eighth, followed by the fifth after that (giving either 'Find ... my ... the ... skylit', or 'Find . . . frosted . . . skylit . . . me'). I have re-transposed the sequences of digits, to no better effect. I have tried lines, first words of lines, last words of line. I have taken the digits in pairs, i.e. as 18, 53 (or 35) and 87 with the same result. I have alternated the beginnings of the lines with the ends of the lines, and vice versa.

I have simplified the expression '1853-87' by interpreting the hyphen as a minus sign. The answer, '1766', does not produce any happier result. The only sensible word-produced is yielded by taking letters in that sequence in the first line, thus giving 'F-i-s-h', but the message does not continue. (A red herring, possibly!)

There are a large number of other combinations and permutations, but no method other than trial and error for seeing whether any make any sense.

The overriding advantage of the mechanical method of deciphering is that the poem itself does not have to make sense; a random sequence of words would fulfil exactly the same purpose of concealing the message. Hence odd words such as 'tiger' need not fall into the category of important words at all: in its place, 'chairman' or 'post-box' would do equally well; these words meet the requirements of the metre, but would not be included in the deciphered message. Likewise, the upper case 'T' in the middle of line 13 is not significant. The fact that the poem does make some kind of sense in places thus merely adds to the bafflement. If this line of thinking is correct, it does not matter what the poem says, or what it means. What is needed is the services of a skilled cryptographer.

Yours faithfully, RENE GRAY, 136 Victoria Park Road, Leicester.

Morse read the letter once only, and decided to wait until his return to the King's Arms (where he had the two earlier cuttings) in order to have a more careful look at the good professor's analysis and suggested methodology. He sounded an engaging sort of fellow, Gray especially with that bit about the 'chairman' and the post-box'.

Back in Dorchester that afternoon, Morse went into the public library and looked up 'Austin' in The Oxford Companion to English Literature. He'd heard of Austin the poet -of course he had; but he'd never known anything much about him, and he was certainly unaware that any poem, or even line, produced by the former poet laureate had merited immortality.

From the library Morse walked on to the post office, where he brought a black and white postcard of Dorchester High Street, and stood for an inordinate length of time in the queue there. He didn't know the price of the stamp for a postcard, and didn't wish to waste a first-class stamp if, as he suspected, the official tariff for

postcards was a few pence lower. It was, he realized, quite ridiculous to wait so long for such a little saving.

But wait Morse did.

Lewis received the card the following morning, the message written Morse's small, neat, and scholarly hand:

Mostly I've not been quite so miserable since last year's holiday, but things are looking up here in D. Warmest regards to you (and to Mrs Lewis) -but not to any of our other colleagues. Have you been following the Swedish lass? I reckon I know what the poem means! Definitely home Sat.

M

This card, with its curmudgeonly message, was delivered to police HQ in Kidlington -since Morse had not quite been able to remember Lewis's Headington address. And by the time it was in Lewis's hands, almost everyone in the building had read it. It might, naturally, have made Lewis a little cross - such contravention of the laws of-privacy.

But it didn't. It made him glad.

## **CHAPTER SEVENTEEN**

Extract from a diary dated Friday, 10 July 1992

Please God let me wake from this dream! Please God may she not be dead! Those words -the ones I so recently wrote - for them may I be forgiven! Those terrible words! -when I disavowed my love for my own flesh and blood, for my own children, for my daughter. But how could I be forgiven? The fates decree otherwise and ever have so decreed. The words may be blotted out but they will remain. The paper may be burned in the furnace but the words will persist for evermore. Oh blackness! Oh night of the soul! Throw open the wide door of hell, Infernal Spirits, for it is I who approach -all hope of virtue, all hope of life abandoned! I have reached the Inferno

and there now read that grim pronouncement of despair above it's portal.

I am sunk deep in misery and anguish of mind and spirit. At my desk I sit here weeping bitter tears. I shout Forgive me! Forgive me! And then I shout again Forgive me! Everyone forgive me! Had I still belief in God I would seek to pray. But I cannot. And even now -even in the abyss of my despair -I have not told the truth! Let it be known that tomorrow I shall once more be happy -some of tomorrow's hours will bring me happiness again. She is coming. She is coming here. She herself has arranged and organized. She it is who has wished to come! For my sake is this? Is this for my need -my grief's sake? Yet such considerations are of minor consequence. She is coming, tomorrow she is coming. More precious to me is that woman even than the mother who suffers all that pain . . .

(Later.) I am so low I wish I were dead. My selfishness my self-is so great that I can have no pity for the others -the others who grieve so greatly. I have just re-read one of Hardy's poems. I used to know it by heart. No longer though and now my left forefinger traces the lines as slowly I copy it out:

I seem but a dead man held on end

To sink down soon . . . O you could not know

That such swift fleeing

No soul foreseeing

Not even I - would undo me so.

I never really managed to speak to you my daughter. I never told you my darling daughter because I did not know - and you can never know why and can never understand.

I have reached a decision. This journal shall be discontinued. Always when I look back on what I have written I see nothing of any worth -only self-indulgence -theatricality -overemotionalism.



Just one plea I make. It was never forced or insincere or hypocritical. No, never!

But no more.

## **CHAPTER EIGHTEEN**

A 'strange coincidence' to use a phrase

By which such things are settled now-a-days

(Lord Byron, Don Juan)

CLAIRE OSBORNE turned right from the A40 down into Banbury Road, knowing that she would have to drive only three or four hundred yards along it, since she had received a detailed map through the post. She was a little surprised -a lot surprised -when she spotted, on her right, the Cotswold House, a considerably more striking and attractive building than the 'suburban, modern, detached,' blurb of The Good Hotel Guide had led her to expect. She experienced an unexpected feeling of delight as she parked her Metro MG (what a disaster not taking that to Lyme!) on the rusty-red asphalt in front of the double-fronted guest-house, built of honey-coloured Cotswold stone in the leafy environs of North Oxford.

Flower-baskets in green, red, purple, and white, hung all around her as she rang the bell at the front door, on which a white notice read 'No Vacancies'. But Claire had earlier found a vacancy, and booked it: a vacancy for two.

The door was opened by a tall, slim man, with a shock of prematurely grey hair, black eyebrows, a slightly diffident smile, and a soft Irish brogue.

'Hello'

'Hello. My name's Mrs Hardinge, and I think you'll find-'

'Already found, Mrs Hardinge. And I'm Jim O'Kane. Now do come in. won't you? And welcome to the Cotswold House.' With which

splendid greeting he picked up her case and led her inside, Claire felt immediately and overwhelmingly impressed.

Brifly O'Kane consulted the bookings register, then selected a key from somewhere, and led the way up a semi-circular staircase, no trouble finding us, I trust?'

'Your little map was very helpful.'

'Good journey?'

'No problems.' O'Kane walked across the landing, inserted a key in Room opened the door, ushered his guest inside, followed her with the suitcase, and then, with a courteous, old-world gesture, hande her a single key - almost as if he were presenting a bouquet flowers to a beautiful girl.

'The key fits your room here and the front door, Mrs Hardinge'

'Fine.'

'And if I could just remind you' -his voice growing somewhat apologetic -'this is a nonsmoking guest-house ... I did mention it when you rang.'

'Yes.' But she was frowning. 'That means - everywhere? Including the bedrooms?'

'Especially the bedrooms,' replied O'Kane, simply if reluctant!'.

Claire looked down at the single key. 'My husband's been held up in London-'

'No problem! Well, only one problem perhaps. We're always a bit pushed for parking - if there are two cars . . . ?'

'He'll have his car, yes. But don't worry about that. There seem to be plenty of room in the side-streets.'

O'Kane appeared grateful for her understanding, and asked if she were familiar with Oxford, with the North Oxford area. And Claire

said, yes, she was; her husband knew the area well, so there was no trouble there.

Wishing Mrs Hardinge well, Mr O'Kane departed -leaving Claire to look with admiration around the delightfully designed and decorated accommodation. En suite, too.

O'Kane was not a judgemental man, and in any case the moralality of his guests was of rather less importance to him than the comfort. But already the signs were there: quite apart from the circumstantial evidence of any couple arriving in separate cars, over the years O'Kane had observed that almost every wedded woman arriving first would show an interest in the in-house amenities and the like. Yet Mrs Hardinge(?) had enquired about none of these ... he would have guessed too (if asked) that she might well pay the bill from her own cheque-book when the couple left -about 50 per cent of such ladies usually did so. In the early days of his business career, such things had worried O'Kane a little. But not so much now. Did it matter? Did it really matter? Any couple could get a mortgage these days -let alone a couple nights' accommodation in a B & B. She was a pleasantly spoken, attractive woman; and as O'Kane walked down the stairs he hoped she'd have a happy time with that Significant Other who would doubtless be arriving soon, ostensibly spending the weekend away from his wife at some Oxford conference. Oxford was full of conferences ...

Claire looked around her. The co-ordinated colour scheme of décor and furnishing was a sheer delight -white, champagne, cerise, mahogany -and reproductions of late-Victorian pictures graced the walls. Beside the help-yourself tea and coffee facilities stood a small fridge, in which she saw an ample supply of milk; and two glasses -and two champagne glasses. For a while she sat on the floral-printed bedspread; then went over to the window and looked out, over the window-box of busy Lizzies, geraniums, and petunias, down on to the Banbury Road. For several minutes she stood there, not knowing whether she was happy or not - trying to stop the clock, to live in the present, to grasp the moment . . . and to hold it.

Then -her heart was suddenly pounding against her ribs. A man was walking along the pavement towards the roundabout. He wore a pink, short-sleeved shirt, and his forearms were bronzed -as if perhaps he might recently have spent a few days beside the sea. In his left hand he carried a bag bearing the name of the local wineshop, Oddbins; in his right hand he carried a bag with the same legend. He appeared deep in thought as he made his way, fairly slowly, across her vision and proceeded up towards the roundabout.

What an amazing coincidence! -the man might have thought had she pushed open the diamond-leaded window and shouted - Remember me? Lyme Regis? Last weekend?' But that would have been to misunderstand matters, for in truth there was no coincidence at all. Claire Osborne had seen to that.

There was a soft knock on her door, and O'Kane asked if she - if either of them - would like a newspaper in the morning: it was part of the service. Claire smiled. She liked the man. She ordered The Sunday Times. Then, for a little while after he was gone she wondered why she felt so sad.

It was not until just before 9 p.m. that Dr Alan Hardinge arrived - explaining, excusing, but as vulnerable, as loving as ever. And - bless him! -he had brought a bottle of Brut Imperial, and a bottle of Skye Talisker malt. And almost, almost (as she later herself) had Claire Osborne enjoyed the couple of hours they spent together that night between the immaculately laundered sheets of Room 1 in the Cotswold House in North Oxford.

Morse had arrived home at 2.30 p.m. that same day. No one, as far as he knew, was aware that he had returned (except Lewis?); yet Strange had telephoned at 4 p.m. Would Morse be happy to take on the case? Well, whether he would be happy or not, Morse was going to take on the case.

At 5 p.m. he had walked down to Summertown and bought eight pint-cans of newly devised 'draught' bitter, which promised him the taste of a hand-pulled, cask-conditioned drop of ale; and two bottles of his favourite Quercy claret. For Morse -considerately out

of condition still -the weight felt a bit too hefty; and outside the Radio Oxford building he halted awhile and looked behind him in the hope of seeing the oblong outline of a red double-decker coming up from the city centre. But there was no bus in sight, so he walked on. As he passed the Cotswold House he saw amongst other things the familiar white sign 'No Vacancies' on the door. He was not surprised. He had heard very well of the place, wouldn't mind staying there himself. Especially for the breakfasts.

## **CHAPTER NINETEEN**

STRANGE had been really quite pleased with all the publicity. Seldom had there been such national interest in a purely notional Tiurder; and the extraordinary if possibly unwarranted ingenuity which the public had already begun to exercise on the originally printed verses was most gratifying - if not as yet of much concrete value. There had been two further offerings in the Letters to the Editor page in the Saturday, 11 July's issue of The Times:

From Gillian Richard Sir, Professor Gray (July 9) seems to me too lightly to dismiss one factor in the Swedish Maiden case. She is certainly, in my view, alive still, but seemingly torn between the wish to live and the wish to die. She has probably never won any poetry competition in her life, and I greatly doubt whether she is to be found as a result of her description of the natural world. But she is out there, in the natural world - possibly living rough; certainly not indoors. I would myself hazard a guess, dismissed by Professor Gray, that she is in a car somewhere, and here the poem's attribution (A. Austin 1853^87) can give us the vital clue. What about an A-registration Austin? It would be a 1983 model, yes; and might we not have the registration number, too? I suggest A 185 -then three letters. If we suppose 3=C, 8=H, and 7=G (the third, eighth, and seventh letters of the alphabet), we have A 185 CGH. Perhaps then our young lady is languishing in an ageing Metro? And if so, sir, we must ask one question: who is the owner of that car? Find her! Yours etc., GILLIAN RICHARD, 26 Hayward Road, Oxford.

From Miss Polly Rayner Sir, I understand from your report on the disappearance a year ago of a Swedish student that her rucksack

was found near the village of Begbroke in Oxfordshire. It may be that I am excessively addicted to your own crossword puzzles but surely we can be justified in spotting a couple of 'clues' here? The '-broke' of the village name is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word 'brok', meaning 'running water' or 'stream'. And since 'beg' is a synonym of 'ask', what else are we to make of the first three words in line 7: 'Ask the stream'? Indeed this clue is almost immediately COD-; firmed two lines later in the injunction 'ask the sun'. 'The Sun' is how the good citizens of Begbroke refer to their local hostelry, and it is in and around that hostelry where in my view the police should re-\* concentrate their enquiries. Yours faithfully,  
POLLY RAYNER, President, Woodstock Local History Society, j  
Woodstock, Oxon.

That was more like it! Strange had earlier that day put suggested car registration through the HQ's traffic computer. No luck! Yet this was just the sort of zany, imaginative idea that might well unlock the mystery, and stimulate a few more such ideas the bargain. When he had rung Morse that same Saturday afternoon (he too had read the postcard!) he had not been at surprised by Morse's apparent -surely only 'apparent'? -lack of interest in taking over the case immediately. Yes, Morse still has a few days' leave remaining -only to the Friday, mind! But, really this case was absolutely up the old boy's street! Tailor-made Morse, this case of the Swedish Maiden . . .

Strange decided to leave things alone for a while though -until the next day. He had more than enough on his plate for the minute. The previous evening had been a bad one, with the city and County police at full stretch with the (virtual) riots on Broadmoor Lea estate: car-thefts, joy-riding, ram-raids, stone throwing . . . With Saturday and Sunday evenings still to come! He felt saddened as he contemplated the incipient breakdown in law and order, contempt for authority -police, church, parents school. . . Augh! Yet in one awkward, unexplored little corner his mind, he knew he could almost understand something of it -just a fraction. For as a youth, and a fairly privileged youth at that, he remembered harbouring a secret desire to chuck a full sized brick through the window of one particularly well-appointed property ...

But yes - quite definitely, yes! - he would feel so very much happier if Morse could take over the responsibility of the case; take it away from his own, Strange's, shoulders. Thus it was that Strange had rung Morse that Saturday afternoon.

'What case?' Morse had asked. 'You know bloody well-' 'I'm still on furlough, sir. I'm trying to catch up with the housework.' 'Have you been drinking, Morse?' 'Just starting, sir.' 'Mind if I come and join you?' 'Not this afternoon, sir. I've got a wonderful - odd, actually! - got a wonderful Swedish girl

in the flat with me just at the moment' 'Oh!' 'Look,' said Morse slowly, 'if there is a breakthrough in the case. If there does seem some

reason-' 'You been reading the correspondence?' 'I'd sooner miss The Archers!' 'Do you think it's all a hoax?' Strange heard Morse's deep intake of breath: 'No! No, I don't. It's just that we're going to

get an awful lot of false leads and false confessions -you know that. We always do. Trouble is, it makes us look such idiots, doesn't it - if we take everything too seriously.'

Yes, Strange accepted that what Morse had just said was exactly his own view. 'Morse. Let me give you a ring tomorrow, all right? We've got those bloody yorks out on Broadmoor Lea to sort it

'Yes, I've been reading about it while I was away.' 'Enjoy your holiday, in Lyme?' 'Not much.' 'Well, I'd better leave you to your . . . your "wonderful Swedish girl" wasn't it?' 'I wish you would.' After Morse had put down his phone, he switched his CD player on again to the Immolation Scene

from the finale of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*; and soon the pure and limpid voice of the Swedish soprano, Birgit Nilsson, resounded again through the chief inspector's flat.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

When I complained of having dined at a splendid table without hearing one sentence IN THE small hours of Sunday, 12 July, Claire Osborne still lay still awake, wondering yet again about what exactly it was she wanted in life. It had been all right -it usually was 'all right'. Alan was reasonably competent, physically -and so loving. She liked him well enough, but she could never be in love with him. She had given him as much of herself as she could; but where, she asked herself, was the memorability of it all? Where the abiding joy in yet another of their brief, illicit, slightly disturbing encounters.

worthy to be he [Dr said, 'There is seldom any such remembered, Johnson] conversation'

(James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson)

'To hell with this sex lark, Claire!' her best friend in Salisbury had said. 'Get a man who's interesting, that's what I say. Like Johnson! Now, he was interesting!'

'Doctor Johnson? He was a great-fat slob, always dribbling his soup down his waistcoat, and he was smelly, and never changed his underpants!'

'Never?'

'You know what I mean.'

'But everybody wanted to hear him talk, didn't they? That's what I'm saying.'

'Yeah. I know what you mean.'

'Yeah!'

And the two women had laughed together - if with little conviction.



Alan Hardinge had earlier said little about the terrible accident: a few stonily spoken details about the funeral; about the little service they were going to hold at the school; about the unexpected helpfulness of the police and the authorities and support groups and neighbours and relatives. But Claire had not questioned him about any aspect of his own grief. She would, she knew, be trespassing upon a territory that was not, and never could be, hers . . . It was

3.30 a.m. before she fell into a fitful slumber.

At the breakfast table the following morning she explained briefly that her husband had been called away and that there would just be her: coffee and toast, please - nothing more. A dozen or so newspapers, room-numbered in the top-right corner, lay in a staggered pile on a table just inside the breakfast room - The Sunday Times not amongst them.

Jim O'Kane seldom paid too much attention to the front page of the 'Sundays'; but ten minutes before Claire had put in appearance, he'd spotted the photograph. Surely he'd seen that young girl before! He took The Sunday Times through to the kitchen where, under the various grills, his wife was watching the progress of bacon, eggs, tomatoes, mushrooms, and sausages. He pointed to the black and white photograph on the front page:

'Recognize her?'

Anne O'Kane stared at the photograph for a few seconds, quizically turning her head one way, then the other, seeking to assess any potential likeness to anyone she'd ever met. 'Should I?'

'I think I do! You remember that young blonde girl who called - about a year ago - when we had a vacancy - one Sunday - and then she called again - later - when we hadn't?'

'Yes, I do remember,' Anne said slowly. 'I think I do.' She had been quickly reading the article beneath the photograph, and she now looked up at her husband as she turned over half a dozen rashers of bacon. 'You don't mean . . .?'

But Jim O'Kane did mean.

Claire was on her last piece of toast when she found her hostess standing beside her with the

newspaper. 'We pinched this for a minute - hope you didn't mind.'

'Course not.'

'It's just that' - Anne pointed to the reproduction - 'well it looks a bit like a young girl who called here once. A young girl who disappeared about a year ago.'

'Long time, a year is.'

'Yes. But Jim - my husband - he doesn't often forget faces; and I think,' she added quietly, 'I think he's right.'

Claire glanced down at the photograph and the article, betraying (she trusted) not a hint of her excitement. 'You'd better tell them - the police, hadn't you?'

'I suppose we should. It's just that Jim met one of the men from CID recently at a charity-do, and this fellow said one of the biggest problems with murders is all the bogus confessions and hoax calls you always get.'

'But if you do recognize her-'

'Not one hundred per cent. Not really. What I do remember is that this girl I'm thinking of called and asked if we'd got a room and then when she knew what it would cost she just sort of... Well, I think she couldn't afford it. Then she called back later, this same girl . . .'

'And you were full?'

Anne O'Kane nodded sadly, and Claire finished a last mouthful of toast. 'Not always easy to know what to do for the best.'

'No.'

'But if your husband knows this CID man he could always just, you know, mention it unofficially, couldn't he?'

'Ye-es. Wouldn't do any harm. You're right. And he only lives just up the road. In one of the bachelor flats.'

'What's his name? Lord Peter Wimsey?'

'Morse. Chief Inspector Morse.'

Claire looked down at her empty plate, and folded her white -linen table napkin.

'More toast?' asked Anne O'Kane.

Claire shook her head, her flawlessly painted lips showing [neither interest nor surprise.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE**

It is only the first bottle that is expensive

(French proverb)

CLAIRE OSBORNE had discovered what she wanted that same morning. However, it was not until the following morning, 13 July (Sunday spent with Alan Hardinge) that she acted upon her piece of research. It had been terribly easy -just a quick look through the two-inch-thick phone-book for Oxford and District which lay beside the pay-phone: several Morses, but only one 'Morse, E and the phone number, to boot! Leys Close, she learned from the Oxford street-map posted on the wall just inside the foyer, looked hardly more than two hundred yards away. She could have asked the O'Kanes, of course . . . but it was a little more exciting not to.

It was another fine sunny morning; and having packed suitcase and stowed it in the boot of the Metro, and with permission to leave the car ('Shouldn't be all that long,' she'd explained), she walked slowly up towards the roundabout, soon coming to the sign 'Residents Only: No Public Right of Way', then turning left through a courtyard, before arriving at a row of two storey, yellow-bricked,

newish properties, their woodwork painted a uniform white. The number she sought was the first numbers saw.

After knocking gently, she noticed, through the window to the left, the white shelving of a kitchen unit and a large plastic bottle of Persil on the draining board. She noticed, too, that the window directly above her was widely open, and she knew that he must be there even before she saw the vague silhouette behind the frosted glass.

What the hell are you doing here? -is that what she'd expected him to say? But he said nothing as he opened the door, bent down to pick up a red-topped bottle of semi-skimmed Co-op milk, stood to one side, inclined his head slightly to the right, and ushered her inside with an old-world gesture of hospitality. She found herself in a large lounge with two settees facing each other, the one to her left in a light honey-coloured leather, to which Morse pointed, which she now sat -a wonderfully soft and comfortable Music was playing -something with a sort of heavyweight sadness about it which she thought she almost recognized. Late nineteenth century? Wagner? Mahler? Very haunting and beautiful. But Morse had pressed a panel in the sophisticated bank of equipment on the shelves just behind the other settee, a smaller black leather, in which he seated himself and looked across his blue eyes showing a hint of amusement but nothing of surprise.

'No need to turn it off for me, you know.'

'Of course not. I turned it off for me. I can never do two things same time.'

Look;ing at the almost empty glass of red wine which stood on the low coffee table beside him, Claire found herself doubting the strictly literal truth of the statement.

'Wagner, was it?'

Morse's eyes lit up with some interest. 'It does show some Wagenerian harmonic and melodic traits, I agree.'

What a load of crap, the pompous oaf! Blast him. Why didn't he just tell her? She pointed to the bottle of Quercy: 'I thought you couldn't cope with two things at once?'

'Ah! But drinking's like breathing, really. You don't have to think about it, do you? And it's good for you -did you know that? There's this new report out saying a regular drop of booze is exceedingly good for the heart.'

'Not quite so good for the liver, though.'

'No.' He smiled at her now, leaning back in the settee, his arms stretched out along the top, wearing the same short-sleeved pink shirt-she'd seen him in the previous Saturday. He probably needed a woman around the house.

'I thought you were supposed to wait till the sun had passed the yard-arm, or something like that.'

'That's an odd coincidence!' Morse pointed to The Times on the table. 'It was in the crossword this morning: "yard-arm".'

'What is a yard-arm, exactly?'

Morse shook his head. 'I'm not interested in boats or that sort of thing. I prefer the Shakespeare quote - remember? That line 'the prick of noon'?'

' "The bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon":

'How on earth did you know that?'

'I once played the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet.'

'Not the sort of thing for a schoolgirl-'

'University, actually.'

'Oh. I was never on the boards much myself. Just the once really. I had a line "I do arrest thee, Antonio". For some reason it made the audience laugh. Never understood why . . .'

Still clutching her copies of the previous day's Sunday Times and the current issue of The Times, Claire looked slowly around at the book-lined walls, at the stacks of records everywhere, at the pictures (one or two of them fractionally askew). She especially admired the watercolour just above Morse's head of the Oxford skyline in a bluey-purple wash. She was beginning to enjoy the conversational skirmishing, she admitted that; but there was still something irritating about the man. For the first time she looked hard, directly across at him.

'You're acting now, aren't you?'

'Pardon?'

'You're pretending you're not surprised to see me.'

'No, I'm not. I saw you sitting outside the Cotswold House yesterday; smoking a cigarette. I was walking down to Cutteslowe for a newspaper.'

'Mind if I smoke now?'

'Please do. I've, er, stopped myself.'

'Since when?'

'Since this morning.'

'Would you like one?'

'Yes, please.'

Claire inhaled deeply, crossed her legs as she sat down and pulled her Jaeger skirt an inch or so below her knees.

'Why didn't you say hello?' she asked.

'I was on the opposite side of the road.'

'Not very pally, was it?'

'Why didn't you say hello to me?'

'I didn't see you.'

'I think you did, though.' His voice was suddenly gentle she had the feeling that he knew far more about her than he should. 'I think you saw me late Saturday afternoon as well -just after you'd arrived.'

'You saw me? You saw me when you walked by with your booze?'

Morse nodded.

Blast him! Blast him! 'I suppose you think you know why I've come here now.'

Morse nodded again. 'It's not because I'm psychic, though. It's | just that Jim, Mr O'Kane, he rang me yesterday . . .'

'About this?' She held up the newspapers.

'About the girl possibly calling there, yes. Very interesting, and very valuable, perhaps - I don't know. They're going to make a statement. Not to me though, I'm on holiday. Remember?'

'So it's a bit of a wasted journey. I was going to tell you - '

'Not a wasted journey - don't say that!'

'I -I kept thinking about the girl -all day yesterday . . . well, quite a few times yesterday . . . You know, her calling there and perhaps not having the money and then -'

'How much does a single room cost there now?'

'I'm not sure. And your acting again! You know perfectly well I booked a double don't you? A double for two nights. You asked O'Kane - you nousey bloody parker!'

For several seconds Morse seemed to look across the room at her with a steady intensity. 'You've got beautifully elegant legs,' he

said simply; but she sensed that her answer may have caused a minor hurt. And suddenly, irrationally, she wanted him to come across the room to her, and take her hand. But he didn't.

Coffee?' he asked briskly. 'I've only got instant, I'm afraid.'

'Some people prefer instant.'

'Do you?'

'No.'

'I don't suppose I can, er, pour you a glass of wine?'

'What on earth makes you suppose that?'

'Quite good,' she commented, a minute or so later.

'Not bad, is it? You need a lot of it though. No good in small quantities.'

She smiled attractively. 'I see you've finished the crossword.'

'Yes. It's always easy on a Monday, did you know that? They act on the assumption that everybody's a bit bleary-brained on i Monday morning.'

'A lot of people take The Times just for the crossword.'

'Yep'

'And the Letters, of course.'

Morse watched her carefully. 'And the Letters,' he repeated slowly.

Claire unfolded her own copy of The Times, 13 July, and read aloud from a front-page article:

### Clues to missing student

Both The Times offices and the Thames Valley Police are each still receiving about a dozen letters a day (as well as many phone



calls) in response to the request for information concerning the disappearance a year ago of Karin Eriksson, the Swedish student who is thought to be the subject of the anonymous verses received by the police and printed in these columns (July 3). Chief Superintendent Strange of Thames Valley CID himself believes that the ingenious suggestions received in one of the latest communications (see Letters, page 15) is the most interesting and potentially the most significant hitherto received.

'You must have read that?'

'Yes. The trouble is, just like Mr and Mrs O'Kane said, you can't follow up everything. Not even a tenth of the things come in. Fortunately a lot of 'em are such crack-pot. . .' He picked up his own copy and turned to page 15, and sat looking (again) at the 'ingenious suggestions'.

'Clever - clever analysis,' he remarked.

'Obviously a very clever fellow - the one who wrote that.'

'Pardon?' said Morse.

'The fellow who wrote that letter.'

Morse read the name aloud: 'Mr Lionel Regis? Don't know him myself.'

'Perhaps nobody does.'

'Pardon?'

'See the address?'

Morse looked down again, and shook his head. 'Don't know Salisbury very well myself.'

'It's my address!'

'Really? So - are you saying you wrote this?'

'Stop it!' she almost shrieked. 'You wrote it! You saw my address in the visitors' book at Lyme Regis, and you needed an address -for this letter, otherwise your -your "ingenious suggestions" wouldn't be accepted. Am I right?'

Morse said nothing.

'You did write it, didn't you? Please tell me!'

'Yes.'

'Why? Why? Why go to all this silly palaver?'

'I just -well, I just picked someone from the top of my mind, that's all. And you -you were there, Claire. Right at the top.'

He'd spoken simply, and his eyes lifted from her legs to her face; and all the frustration, all the infuriation, suddenly drained away from her, and the tautness in her shoulders was wonderfully relaxed as she leaned back against the soft contours of the settee. For a long time neither of them spoke. Then Claire sat forward, emptied her glass, and got to her feet.

'Have you got to go?' asked Morse quietly.

'Fairly soon.'

'I've got another bottle.'

'Only if you promise to be nice to me.'

'If I tell you what lovely legs you've got again?'

'And if you put the record on again.'

'CD actually. Bruckner Eight.'

'Is that what it was? Not all that far off, was I?'

'Very close, really,' said Morse. Then virtually to himself: for a minute or two, very close indeed.

It was halfway through the second movement and three-quarters of the way through the second

bottle that the front doorbell rang.

'I can't see you for the minute, I'm afraid, sir.'

Strange sniffed, his small eyes suspicious.

'Really? I'm a little bit surprised about that, Morse. In fact I'm suprisedyou can't see two of me!'

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

In a Definition-and-Letter-Mixture puzzle, each clue consists of a sentence

which contains a definition of the answer and a mixture of the letters (Don Manley, Chambers Crossword Manual]

THERE WERE just the two of them in Strange's office the following morning, Tuesday, 14 July.

It had surprised Strange not a little to hear of Morse's quite unequivocal refusal to postpone a few days of his furlough and return immediately to HQ to take official charge of the case especially in view of the latest letter -surely the break they'd all been hoping for. On the other hand there were more things in life than a blonde damozel who might or might not have been murdrered a year ago. This bloody 'joy' (huh!)-riding, for a start - now hitting the national news and the newspaper headlines. It served, though, to put things into perspective a bit -like the letter he himself had received in the post ('Strictly Personal') that very morning:

To Chief Superintendent Strange, Kidlington Police HQ Dear Sir, It is naturally proper that our excellent whodunnit writers should pretend that the average criminal in the UK can boast the capacity for quite exceptional ingenuity in the commission of crime. But those of us who (like you) have given our lives to the detection of such crime should at this present juncture be reminding everyone

that the vast majority of criminals are not (fortunately!) blessed with the sort of alpha-plus mentality that is commonly assumed.

Obviously if any criminal is brought to book as a result of the correspondence etc. being conducted in sections of the national press, we shall all be most grateful. But I am myself most doubtful about such an outcome, and indeed in a wider sense I am very much concerned about the precedent involved. We have all heard of trial by TV, and we now seem to be heading for investigation by correspondence column. This is patently absurd. As I read things, the present business is pretty certainly a hoax in any case, with its perpetrator enjoying himself (or I suppose herself?) most hugely as various correspondents vie with one another in scaling ever steeper and steeper peaks of interpretive ingenuity. If the thing is not a hoax, I must urge that all investigation into the matter be communicated in the first instance to the appropriate police personnel, and most certainly not to radio, TV, or newspapers, so that the case may be solved through the official channels of criminal investigation.

Yours sincerely, Peter Armitage (former Assistant Commissioner, New Scotland Yard) PS I need hardly add, I feel sure, that this letter is not for publication in any way.

But this must almost certainly have been written before its author had seen the latest communiqué from the most intrepid mountaineer so far: the writer of the quite extraordinary letter - which had appeared in the correspondence columns of The Times the previous morning, Strange now turned to Lewis. 'You realize it's the break, don't you'

Lewis, like every other police officer at HQ, had read the letter; and yes, he too thought it was the break. How else? But he couldn't understand why Strange had asked him -him -along this morning. He was very tired anyway, and should by rights have been a-bed. On both Saturday and Sunday nights, like most officers in the local forces, his time had been spent until almost dawn behind a riot-shield, facing volleys of bricks and insults from gangs of yobbos clapping the skidding-skills of youths in stolen cars -amongst whom (had Lewis known it) was a seventeen-year-

old schoolboy who was later to provide the key to the Swedish Maiden mystery.

`'Lewis! You're listening, aren't you?' 'Sorry, sir?' 'You do remember Morse belly-aching about transferring the search from Blenheim to Wytham?'

'Yes, sir. But he wasn't on the case more than a day or so.'

'I know that,' snapped Strange. 'But he must have had some reason, surely?'

'I've never quite been able to follow some of his reasons.'

'Do you know how much some of these bloody searches cost?'

'No, sir.'

Nor perhaps did Strange himself, for he immediately changed tack: 'Do you think Morse was right?'

'I dunno, sir. I mean, I think he's a great man, but he sometimes gets things awfully wrong, doesn't he?'

'And he more often gets things bloody right' said Strange with vehemence.

It was an odd reversal of roles, and Lewis hastened to put the record straight. 'I think myself, sir, that-'

'I don't give a sod what you think, Sergeant! If I want to search Wytham Woods I'll bloody well search 'em till a year next Friday if I - If I think it's worth the candle. All right?'

Lewis nodded wordlessly across the table, watching the rising florid exasperation in the Super's face.

'I'm not sure where I come into all this - ' he began.

'Well, I'll tell you! There's only one thing you can do and I can't, Sergeant, and that's to get the morose old bugger back to work

here -smartish. I'm under all sorts of bloody pressure . ..'

'But he's on holiday, sir.'

'I know he's on bloody holiday. I saw him yesterday, drinkin shampers and listening to Schubert - with some tart or other.'

'Sure it was champagne, sir?'

But quietly now, rather movingly, Strange was making his plea 'Christ knows why, Lewis, but he'll always put himself out a for you. Did you realize that?'

He rang from Morse's own (empty) office.

'Me, sir. Lewis.'

'I'm on holiday.'

'Super's just had a word with me-'

'Friday - that's what I told him.'

'You've seen the letter about Wytham, sir?'

'Unlike you and your philistine cronies, Lewis, my daily reading includes the royal circulars in The Times, the editorials - '

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What do I tell the Super, sir? He wants us - you and me - to take over straightaway.'

'Tell him I'll be in touch - tomorrow.'

'Tell him you'll ring, you mean?'

'No. Tell him I'll be back on duty tomorrow morning. Tell him be in my office any time after seven a.m.'

'He won't be awake then, sir.'

'Don't be too hard on him, Lewis. He's getting old -and I think he's got high blood pressure.'

As he put down the phone, with supreme contentment, Lewis knew that Strange had been right about Morse and himself; realized that in the case of the Swedish Maiden, the pair of them were in business again - w.e.f. the following morning.

In his office, Strange picked up the cutting from The Times and read the letter yet again. Quite extraordinary!

From Mr Lionel Regis Sir, Like most of your other correspondents I must assume that the 'Swedish Maiden' verses were composed by the person responsible for the murder of that unfortunate young lady. It is of course possible they were sent as a hoax, but such is not my view. In my opinion it is far more probable that the writer is exasperated by the inability of the police to come anywhere near the discovery of a body, let alone the arrest of a murderer. The verses, as I read them, are a cry from the murderer - not the victim - a cry for some discovery, some absolution, some relief from sleepless, haunted nights. But I would not have written to you, sir, merely to air such vague and dubious generalities. I write because I am a setter of crossword puzzles, and when I first studied the verses I had just completed a puzzle in which the answer to every clue was indicated by a definition of the word to be entered, and also by a sequenced anagram of the same word. It was with considerable interest therefore -and a good measure of incredulity -that I gradually spotted the fact that the word WYTHAM crops up, in anagrammatized form, in each of the five stanzas. Thus: THAW MY (stanza 1); [stre]AM WHY T[ELL'ST] (stanza 2); WHAT MY (stanza 3); [S]AW THYM[E] (stanza 4); and [no]w THY MA[iden] (stanza 5). The occurrence of five such instances is surely way beyond the bounds of coincidence. (I have consulted my mathematical friends on this matter.) 'Wytham', I learn (I am not an Oxford man), is the name of some woods situated to the west of Oxford. If the verse tells us anything then, it is surely that the body sought is to be found in Wytham Woods, and it is my humble suggestion that any further searches undertaken should be

conducted in that quarter. Yours, LIONEL REGIS, 16 Cathedral Mews, Salisbury.

Like Lewis, Strange remembered exactly what Morse had on his postcard: 'I reckon I know what the poem means!', and pushed the newspaper aside, and looked out across the car park. 'Lionel Regis, my arse!' he said quietly to himself.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE**

On another occasion he was considering how best to welcome the postman, for he brought news from a world outside ourselves. I and he agreed to stand behind the front door at the time of his arrival and to ask him certain questions. On that day, however, the postman did not come

(Peter Champkin, *The Sleeping Life of Aspern Williams*]

WEDNESDAY, 15 July, was never going to be a particularly memorable day. No fire-faced prophet was to bring news of the Message or the name of the One True God. Just a fairly ordinary transitional sort of day in which events appeared discrete and only semi-sequential; when some of the protagonists in the Swedish Maiden case were moved to their new positions on the chessboard, but before the game was yet begun.

At a slightly frosty meeting held in the Assistant Chief Constable's office at 10.30 a.m., the Swedish Maiden case was reviewed in considerable detail by the ACC himself, Chief Superintendent Strange and Detective Chief Inspectors Johnson and Morse. General agreement was reached (only one dissident voice) that perhaps there was little now to be gained from any prolongation of the extensive and expensive search-programme on the Blenheim Palace Estate. The decision was reported too, emanating from 'Higher authority', that Morse was now i/c and that Johnson would therefore be enabled to take his midsummer furlough as scheduled, official verbiage would fool no one, of course - but it was possibly better than nothing at all.



Amongst the items reviewed was yet another letter, printed that morning in The Times:

From Mr John C. Chavasse

Sir, The Wood (singular not plural please) at Wytham is a place most familiar to me and I suspect to almost all generations of young men who have taken their degrees at Oxford University. Well do I remember the summer weekends in the late 40's when together with many of my fellow undergraduates I cycled up through Lower Wolvercote to Wytham.

In lines 14 and 15 of the (now notorious!) verses, we find 'A creature white' (sic) Trapped in a gin' (sic), 'Panting like a hunted deer' (sic). Now if this is not a cryptic reference to a gin-and-whatnot in that splendid old hostelry in Wytham, the White Hart - then I'm a Dutchman, sir! But I am convinced (as an Englishman) that such a reference can only serve to corroborate the brilliant analysis of the verses made by Mr Lionel Regis (Letters, July 13).

Yours faithfully, JOHN C. CHAVASSE, 21 Hayward Road, Bishop Auckland.

Around the table, 'Mr Lionel Regis' looked slightly sheepish but not for long, and now it was all an open secret anyway. He realized that there would be little he could do for a day or so except to re-read all the material that had accumulated from the earlier enquiries; to sit tight; to get Lewis cracking on the admin and perhaps to try to think a bit more clearly about his own odd/irrational conviction that the young student's body would be found -and found in Wytham Wood(s). There was that little bit of new evidence, too -the call from the O'Kanes. For if their memories! served them to any degree aright, then Karin Eriksson had some point gone down the Banbury Road from the roundabout; was the testimony of the man who had been waiting for a bus then that Sunday noon-time which should have been given credence not that of the man who had driven along Sunderland Avenue.

Such and similar thoughts Morse shared with Sergeant in the early afternoon. Already arrangements were well in hand for the availability of about twenty further members of various local forces to supplement the thirty due to be switched immediately from Blenheim. One annoying little hold-up, though, head forester at Wytham, Mr David Michaels, was unfortunately away that day at a National Trust conference in Durham. But he was expected home later that night, his wife said, and would almost certainly be available the following morning.

Things were moving, that afternoon. But slowly. And Morse was feeling restless and impatient. He returned home at 4 p.m., and began typing a list of gramophone records.

Before leaving him the previous Monday, a quarter of an hour after Strange's inopportune interruption, Claire Osborne had asked him to send her his eight Desert Island Discs and the versions he possessed of the Mozart Requiem, It was high time she started to improve her mind a bit, she'd said; and if Morse would promise to try to help her . . . ? So Morse had promised, and reiterated his promise as he'd kissed her briefly, sweetly, fully on the lips, at her departure.

'You do know my address, I think?' she'd shouted from the gate. Morse was still not quite sure of numbers seven and eight as he sat and slowly typed his list that afternoon.

A quarter of an hour or so before Morse had begun his labour of love, Philip Daley swaggered loutishly out of his class-room in the Cherwell School, just along the Marston Ferry Road in North Oxford. Only two more days to go! Roll on! School would be finishing on the 17th and he couldn't wait to get shot of it. Shot of it for good and all! His dad (his dad's own words) didn't give a fuckin' toss, though his mum (as he knew very well) would have been glad if he could have settled down to schoolwork and stayed on in the sixth form and maybe landed up with a decent job and all that bullshit. But other thoughts were uppermost in his bitterly discontented mind as he walked up the Banbury Road that afternoon. At lunch-time he'd asked one of the girls from his class, the one with the blouseful, whether she'd go with him to the end-

of-term disco; and she'd said he must be bloody jokin' and anyway she'd already got a feller, 'adn't she?

Soddin' cunt! As he walked up to the shops he crashed his fist against some ancient wooden fencing there: fuck it, fuck it, fuck it! Just wait till Friday, though. He'd show the fuckin' lot of 'em.

It was at 7.15 p.m., twelve hours after reaching HQ earlier that day, that Lewis sat down at his home in Headington to his beloved eggs and chips.

\* Blast him! thought Claire, as she turned first to one side and the other in her bed that night. She could not understand at all why he was monopolizing her thoughts -but he was. And blast that other copper -that fat slob of a man who'd stood there talking to him on the doorstep for almost a quarter of an hour. She'd have had to leave very soon anyway, she realized that. But it had meant there had been no time to develop that little passage of intimacy between them . . . and now, and again, and again, he was passing through her mind. Bloody nuisance, it all was! Only temporary, she trusted -this inability to sleep, this inability to thrust him from her thoughts. She just hoped she'd get a letter from him in the next post, that's all. He said he'd write; he'd promised; and she'd been looking out eagerly for the postman.

On that day, however, the postman did not come.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR**

The Grantor leaves the guardianship of the Woodlands to the kindly sympathy of the

University . . . The University will take all reasonable steps to preserve and

maintain the woodlands and will use them for the instruction of suitable students and

will provide facilities for research

(Extract from the deed under which Wytham Wood was acquired by the University of

Oxford on 4 August 1942 as a gift from Col. ffennell)

MANY Oxonians know 'Wytham' as the village on the way to the wood. But Morse knew the spot as the village, situated on the edge of the wood, which housed the White Hart Inn; and he pointed lovingly to the hostelry the next morning as Lewis drove the pair of them to their meeting with the head forester.

'Did you know,' asked Morse (consulting his leaflet) 'that in the parish of Wytham, a large part of it covered with woods, the round rises from the banks of the Thames - or "Isis" - to a height of 539 feet at Wytham Hill, the central point of the ancient parish?'

'No, sir,' replied Lewis, turning right just after the pub into a stretch of progressively narrowing roadway that was very soon marked by the sign 'Private Property: University of Oxford'.

'You don't sound very interested -'

'Look!' shouted Lewis. 'See that?'

'No!' In his youth Morse had almost invariably been the boy in the group who missed out; whilst his schoolmates were perpetually-spotting birds' eggs, the blue flash of kingfishers, or gingery foxes momentarily motionless at the edge of cornfields, the young Morse had seldom seen anything; the old Morse had seen nothing now.

'What exactly was the cause of all the excitement, Lewis?'

'Deer, sir. Roe-deer, I think. Two of them, just behind -'

'Are they different from normal deer?'

'I don't reckon you're going to be too much help in this neck of the woods, sir.'

Morse made no comment on such a nicely turned phrase, Lewis drove half a mile or so further, with an area of fairly dense woodland on his left, until he reached a semi-circular parking lot also on his left. 'Cars must be left at one of the two car parks shown on the plan', the map said; and in any case a locked barrier across the road effectively blocked further progress to motor vehicles. Lewis pulled the police car in beside an ancient, rusting Ford.

'Good to see some people care, sir,' ventured Lewis, pointing to an RSPB sticker on one side window and a larger 'Save the Whale' plea on the other.

'Probably here for a snog under the sycamores,' Morse replied cheerfully.

A low, stone-built cottage stood thirty yards or so back on the further side of the track. 'That must be where Mr Michaels lives, sir. Nice view - looking right across there to Eynsham.'

'C'mon,' said Morse.

It was just past the barrier, which they negotiated via a kissing gate, set in its V-shaped frame, that the two detectives came, on their left, to a large clearing, some 100 yards square, with fir saplings planted around the fenced perimeter, in which was set, whole complex of sheds and barns, built in horizontally slatted wood, with piles of spruce-and fir-logs stacked nearby, and with several tractors and pieces of tree-felling machinery standing beside or beneath the open-fronted barns.

From the furthest shed a figure walked down the slope to greet them - a man of about fifty or so, blue-eyed, closely bearded, little short of six foot -introducing himself as David Michaels, the head forester. They shook hands with the man, Morse being careful to keep slightly behind Lewis as a black and white dog, bounding energetically after his master, sought to introduce himself too.

In the forester's hut, Michaels briefly described the lay-out the woods (plural!), referring repeatedly to the four Ordnance Survey

maps on the inner wall, themselves pinned together in large oblong to give a synoptic view of the whole area under forester's charge. There was a University Committee, the policemen learnt, administering Wytham Woods, to whom he (Michael was personally responsible, with a University Land Agent acting as Executive Officer; and it was to the latter that the police would need to apply formally. Permits to walk in the woods (this in answer to Lewis) were issued, on request, to any resident teachers or administrators in the University, and of course to any other citizen, Town or Gown, who was able to provide adequate cause, and no criminal impediment, for wishing to visit the area.

Morse himself became more interested when Michaels moved closer to the maps and expanded on the woods' main attractions, his right forefinger tracing its way through what (to Morse) was ~wonderfully attractive-sounding catalogue: Duck Pond; The Follies; Bowling Alley; Cowleaze Copse; Froghole Cottage; Hatch-, tit Lane; Marley Wood; Pasticks; Singing Way; Sparrow Lane . . . almost like the music of the woods and birds themselves.

But as he watched and listened, Morse's heart was sinking --lightly lower. The woodlands were vast; and Michaels himself, now in his fifteenth year there, admitted that there were several areas where he had never -probably would never -set foot; parts known only to the badgers and the foxes and the deer and the families of woodpeckers. Yet somehow the mention of the woodpeckers appeared to restore Morse's confidence, and he gratefully accepted the forester's offer of a guided tour.

Lewis sat on the floor in the back of the rugged, powerful, ineffably uncomfortable and bouncy Land-rover, with Bobbie, the only dog allowed in the woods. Morse sat in the front with Michaels, who spent the next ninety minutes driving across the tracks and rides and narrow paths which linked the names of his earlier litany.

For a while Morse toyed with the idea of bringing in the military perhaps -a couple of thousand men from local units, under the command of some finicky brigadier sitting in Caesar's tent and

ticking off the square yards one by one. Then he put his thoughts into words:

'You know I'm beginning to think it'd take an army a couple of months to cover all this.'

"Oh, I don't know," replied Michaels. Surprisingly?

'No?'

Patiently the forester explained how during the summer months there were dozens of devotees who regularly checked the numbers of eggs and weights of fledglings in the hundreds of bird-boxes there; who laid nocturnal wait to observe the doings of the badgers who clipped tags and bugging devices to fox-cubs; and so many others who throughout the year monitored the ecological pattern that Nature had imposed on Wytham Woods. Then there were the members of the public who were forever wandering around with their birdwatchers' guides and their binoculars, or looking for woodland orchids, or just enjoying the peace and beauty of it all ...

Morse was nodding automatically through much of the recital and he fully took the point that Michaels was making; he'd guessed as much anyway, but things were clearer in his mind now.

'You mean there's a good deal of ground we can probably forget. . .'

'That's it. And a good deal you can't.'

'So we need to establish some priorities,' Lewis chirped up from the rear.

'That was the, er, general conclusion that Mr Michaels myself had just reached, Lewis.'

'Eighteen months ago, all this was, you say?' asked Michaels.

'Twelve, actually.'

'So if. . . if she'd been . . . just left there, you know, without trying to hide her or anything . . . ?'

'Oh yes, there probably wouldn't be all that much of her still around -you'll know that better than most. But it's more often "found in a shallow grave", isn't it? That's the jargon. Not surprising though that murderers should want to cover up their crimes: they often dig a bit and put twigs and leaves and things over . . over the top. But you need a spade for that. In the summer you'd need a sharp spade -and plenty of time, and a bit of daylight, and a bit of nerve . . . They tell me it takes a couple of sextons about eight hours to dig a decent grave.'

Perhaps it was the crudity and cruelty of the scene just conjured up which cast a gloom upon them now -and they spoke no more of the murder for the rest of the bumpy journey. Just about birds. Morse asked about woodpeckers, and Michaels knew a great deal about woodpeckers: the green, the great-spotted, the lesser-spotted, - all had their habitats within the woods and all were of especial interest to birdwatchers.

'You interested in woodpeckers, Inspector?'

'Splendid birds,' muttered Morse vaguely.

Back in the hut, Morse explained the limitation of his likely resources and the obvious need therefore for some selective approach. 'What I'd really like to know is this -please don't feel offended, Mr Michaels. But if you wanted to hide a body in these woods, which places would come to mind first?'

So Michaels told them; and Lewis made his notes, feeling a little uneasy about his spelling of some of the names which Morse had earlier found so memorable.

When twenty minutes later the trio walked down towards the police car, they heard a sharp crack

of a gun.



'One of the farmers,' explained Michaels. 'Taking a pot at some pigeons, like as not.'

'I didn't see any guns in your office,' commented Lewis.

'Oh, I couldn't keep 'em there! Against the law, that is, Sergeant.'

'But I suppose you must have one - in your job, sir?'

'Oh yeah! Couldn't do without. In a steel cabinet in there' - Michaels pointed to the low cottage - 'well and truly locked away, I believe me! In fact, I'm off to do a bit of shooting now.'

'Off to preserve and maintain some of the local species, Mr L Michaels?'

But the degree of sarcasm behind Morse's question was clearly ill-appreciated by the bearded woodsman, who replied with a decided coolness: 'Sometimes -quite often -it's essential to keep some sort of stability within any eco-system, and if you like I'll tell you a few things about the multiplication-factor of one or two of the randier species of deer. If I had my way, Inspector, I'd issue them all with free condoms from that white machine in the gents at the White Hart. But they wouldn't take much notice of me, would they?' For a few seconds Michaels' eyes glinted with the repressed anger of a professional man being told his job by some ignorant amateur.

Morse jumped in quickly. 'Sorry! I really am. It's just that as Li get older I can't really think of killing things. Few years ago have trodden on a spider without a thought, but these days -I don't know why - I almost feel guilty about swatting a daddy-long-legs.' 'You wouldn't find me killing a daddy-long-legs!' said Michaels' his eyes still hard as they stared unblinkingly back at Morse's. Blue versus blue; and for a few seconds Morse wondered what exactly Michaels would kill . . . and would be killing now.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE**

For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together (St Matthew, ch. 24, v. 28)

REGIS'S (Morse's) cracking of the Swedish Maiden verses had sparked off a whole series of letters about the Great Wood at Wytham. But only one of these letters was to be published by The Times that week -the latest in a correspondence which was gripping the interest of that daily's readers:

From Stephen Wallhead, RA Sir, It was with interest that I read what must surely be the final analysts of the Swedish Maiden affair. I had not myself, of course, come within a mile of the extraordinarily subtle interpretation (Letters, July 13) in which Wytham Woods are suggested -surely more than suggested -as the likeliest resting-place of that unfortunate girl. My letter can make only one small addendum; but I trust an interesting one, since the injunction 'Find the Woodman's daughter' (1. 6 of the verses) may now possibly be of some vital significance.

An oil-on-canvas painting, The Woodman's Daughter, was worked on by John Everett Millais in 1850-1. It depicts the young son of a squire offering a handful of strawberries to the young daughter of a woodman. Millais (as always) was meticulous about his work, and the whole picture is minutely accurate in its research: for example, we know from the artist Arthur Hughes that the strawberries in the boy's hands were bought at Covent Garden in March 1851!

The background to this picture shows a woodland area with a clear perspective and a distinctive alignment of trees, and in my view it is at least a possibility that even allowing for decades of cutting-down and replantation the original site could be established. But here is the point, sir! From the diary of one of the artist's friends, Mrs Joanna Matthews, RA, we learn as follows: 'Millais is hard at work painting the background of his picture from nature in Wytt,am Wood' (my italics). Could not such a background point the place where the body is to be found? And may we not further infer that our murderer has not only an intimate knowledge of the woods themselves but also of the Pre-Raphaelite painters?

Yours faithfully, STEPHEN WALLHEAD, Wymondham Cottage,  
Helpston,

Lines.

Early on the morning of Friday, 17 July, this letter had seen by Strange, Morse, Lewis, and most of the personnel on at Thames Valley HQ. But not by everyone.

'Just tell me exactly what the 'ell we're supposed to be looking for!' Constable Jimmy Watt complained to his colleague, Constable Sid Berridge, as the two of them halted for a while, side by side in the riding between Marley Wood on their right and Pasticks -their left.

Seventeen of them, there were, working reasonably scientifically through this particular stretch. Watt had been seconded only that day, taken (quite willingly) off traffic duties, while Berridge had already spent the earlier part of his week in Blenheim. And in truth, their present duties were unwelcome to neither of them, for the temperature was already warm that morning, the sky an almost cloudless Cambridge blue.

'We're looking for a condom, Jimmy - preferably one with a handful of fingerprints on it-'

'Wha'? Bloody year ago?'

'-so's Morse'll be able to discover which 'and he pulled it with.'

'We used to call 'em "french letters" in my day,' said with a hint of nostalgia in his voice.

'Yeah. Things change, though.'

'Yeah! Some of us missed out a bit, don't you reckon? The way some of these young 'uns ...'

'Yeah.'

'Who'd you wanna go in there with, though?' Watt pointed it his left, to the dense patch of forestation nearby.

Berridge rose to the challenge: 'Brigitte Bardot? Liz Taylor Joan Collins? Madonna? Me next-door neighbour's wife-'

'In there, though?'

Berridge decided to scale down his previous decision: 'Perhaps not. . . Perhaps only the woman next-door.'

It had been an hour earlier, at 8.30 a.m., that a member of the Wytham Trust had addressed their party, and explained why Pasticks could be a reasonably safe each-way bet for a site where a body may have lain undisturbed for a longish time. Why? Well, most people would think that the cutting-down of trees and the selling of the wood to wholesale dealers was invariably going to a profitable undertaking. Not so! The expense of hiring men to saw down trees, to trim the fallen timber, then to transport and treat it, and finally to sell it to furniture dealers, or fencing designers or the rest - such expense would always be considerable. And the Trust had long since agreed that it could do little better than see the whole business of thinning the woods, etc., as, well, as tit-for-tat: they would pay nothing for the cutting-back of the various copses and spinneys; and in turn the wood-cutters and carters would receive the proceeds from the tens of thousands of assorted trunks that were annually removed from Wytham Woods. But occasionally there was a bit of a hiccup in the system -when, for example, a few of the areas of reforestation were not quite ready for such biennial decimation; when the thinning of a particular area ought, for whatever reason, to be delayed for a couple of years.

Such a situation had in fact arisen the year before in the very latest plantation (1958-62) a mixed hardwood affair of Norwegian spruce, oak, beech, red cedar -in the area called Pasticks. And that wouldn't be a bad place to leave a body! The trees there allowed in very little light; and in the middle of it all were three four old spinneys that had existed even before the Enclosure Dense places. Double-dense.

For Berridge and Watt the task certainly looked uninviting. From any point some two or three yards within the wood it seemed almost as if a curtain had been drawn in front of them, cutting them off from any further investigation, with the leafless horizontal and perpendicular branches of the trees there forming a sort of blurring criss-cross mesh of brown across their vision.

It was a good many hours later, at 3.55 p.m., that the deeply and progressively more pessimistic pair of constables heard a shout of triumph from somewhere to their left. A body had been found; and very soon each wing of the search-party had enfolded the scene like the wings of a mother-bird protecting her young.

The foxes had already been there -often enough by the look of -;-d the badgers, and the birds of the air ... for the bones of what appeared to be a single human being had been dragged apart there -in some cases seemingly removed -from their familiar configuration. Yet not so far removed as to render the pristine pattern unrecognizable. A femur still lay in its approximately normal relationship to its pelvis; a few ribs still in roughly parallel formation above it; a shoulder bone in a vaguely formal relationship with the vertebrae; and the vertebrae themselves about two or three feet separated from a comparatively small and badly savaged skull; not far from which was a faded, tasselled neck-scarf still boasting its original colours -the twin proud colours of the Swedish national flag.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX**

Science is spectrum analysis: art is photosynthesis (Karl Kraus, Half Truths One and a Half Truths)

WORD quickly spread and the verdict in all quarters was the same: here he was -only a couple of days into the investigation, only day into the search, and eureka! Clever bugger, Morse! A bit lucky, perhaps. Could have been another week before they'd found her if they'd started at the other, the western, side of the woods.

'Touch nothing!', 'Keep your distance!' had been the orders of the day and it had been around an unmolested, untrodden area of four or five square yards of woodland, carpeted with a thick, darkish-brown pile, that a rather irregular cordon had been drawn.

Morse had arrived on the scene within twenty minutes, and now stood there silently, not venturing beyond the waist-high red and e tape, his eyes recording the evidence before him. He saw the dislocated pattern of the bones; the scattered, residual clothes; and especially he saw the tasselled scarf beside the horridly damaged head. It reminded him of something from a DIY manual, in which various arrows point from the outer-lying parts towards a putative centre giving instruction for the assemblage of the purchase: 'Bring this part into there; attach this part to that; connect here; it will fit, all of it, if only you take your time, read the instructions carefully, know that you are going wrong if more than gentle force is required for the final assembly.' Occasionally Morse moved his weight slightly on the packed twigs and spindles beneath his feet, but still he said nothing. And the others standing there were silent too, like awkward mourners at a funeral.

Lewis, busily negotiating that afternoon with the University authorities, would not be with him. But neither of them, neither Morse nor Lewis, would be of much use at this stage. It was Max who was going to be the important personage, and Max had already been informed, was already on his way; Max who ten minutes later made his lumbering progress across the crackling bracken, and stood wheezing heavily beside Morse.

Silently, just as Morse had done earlier, the hump-backed surgeon surveyed the sorry sight which lay at the foot of an evergreen of some sort, the lower branches leafless, brittle, dead. If an attempt had been made to conceal the body, it was not now apparent; and disturbingly (as others had already noticed) a few of the major bones, including the whole of the lower left arm, had been carried away somewhere -to some den or earth or sett. From the look of it the clothes were slightly better preserved than the body: several strips of stained white, and substantial remnants of what looked

like blue jeans, perhaps; and some yellowish, straw coloured hair still gruesomely attached to the skull.

But Morse hadn't kept his eyes long on the skull . . .

'This what you've been looking for, Morse?'

'Yes. I think that's her.'

'Her?'

'I'm certain it's a "her",' said Morse with finality.

'Do you know the last words my old mother said? She'd been baking earlier in the day - the day she died. Then she was taken to her bed, but she still wanted to see how the fruit cake was doing. And it was flat. The bloody thing forgot to rise, Morse! And she said, "You know, life's

full of uncertainties". Then she closed her eyes - and died.'

'It's the girl,' repeated Morse simply.

Max made no further comment, staring guardedly on as Morse nodded to the scenes-of-crime officer and the police photograph both of whom had been standing waiting for some while. If there was anything of any import there that Morse should have seen, he was not aware of it; but he still felt nervous about the patch of ground and instructed both to keep as far as possible from the grisly finds.

After a few minutes of photographic flashing, Max stepped rather gingerly into the area, hooked a pair of ancient spectacles around his large ears, looked down at the scattered skeleton, and picked up a bone.

'Femur, Morse. Femur, femoris, neuter. The thigh bone.' 'So?' Max placed the bone down carefully and turned to Morse 'Look, old friend, I don't very often

ask you for any forensic guidance, but just for once give me a little advice, will you? What the hell am I supposed to do with this bloody lot?'

Morse shook his head. 'I'm not sure.' But suddenly his eyes glowed as if some inner current had been activated. 'I knew she'd be here, Max' he said slowly. 'Somehow I knew it! And I'm going find out who murdered our Swedish Maiden. And I want you to help me, Max! Help me paint a picture of what went on in this place.'

The almost Messianic fierceness with which Morse had enunciated these words would have affected most people. But not Max.

'You're the artist, dear boy: I'm just a humble scientist.'

'How long will you be?'

'Looking at the bones, you mean?'

'And the clothes . . . and the underclothes.'

'Ah, yes! I remember. You've always had an interest in underclothes' He consulted his watch. 'Opening time at six? I'll see you the upstairs bar at the White Hart-'

'No. I've got a meeting back at HQ at half-past six.'

'Really? I thought you were in charge of this case, Morse.'

There were the four of them again: the ACC, Strange, Johnson, Morse; and for the latter, naturally, congratulations were generous. For Johnson, however, there were very mixed feelings: Morse had come up with the girl's body in a couple of days, whilst had come up with nothing in a twelve-month. That was the simple truth of the matter. It was good for the case, of course; but much good for his own morale or his rating amongst his colleagues, or for his wife ... or indeed for his newly acquired mother-in-law. But when, an hour later, the meeting broke up, he shook Morse's hand and wished him well, and almost meant it.



After the ACC and Johnson had left, Strange in turn wished Morse continued success, observing that now Morse had come up with a body, all that remained for him was to come up with a murderer, so that he, Strange, would be able to get a nice little report and send it to the DPP. No problems! Then they'd kick the smart-alec defence lawyers up the arse, and stick the bugger who did it in the nick for the rest of his natural. Put a rope round his bloody neck, too, if Strange had his way.

'Just as well we didn't hang the Birmingham Six,' said Morse quietly.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

**a maxim**  
**It was with Foxey - father, gentlemen, Always suspect**  
**our revered**  
everybody'

(Charles Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop)

ON THE following morning, Saturday, 18 July, Morse appeared as Lewis saw things, somewhat distanced, somewhat reserved. It was customary for the chief to start, if not always to continue the case with a surfeit of confidence and exuberance, and doubtless that would soon be the way of things again; just not for moment.

'Not really all that much to go on there, sir.' Lewis nodded the two red box-files on the table.

'I've done my homework too, you know.'

'Where do we start?'

'Difficult. We ought really to wait till we hear from Max before we do too much.'

'All this DNA stuff, you mean?'

'DNA? He doesn't know what it stands for!'

'When's the report due?'

'Today some time, he said.'

'What's that mean?'

'Tonight?' Morse shrugged. But he suddenly sat forward in the black leather chair, appeared to sharpen up, took out his silver Parker pen, and began making a few minimal notes as he spoke:

'There are several people we've got to see pretty soon.'

'Who are you thinking of, sir?'

'Of whom am I thinking? Well, number one, there's the fellow who found the rucksack -Daley. We'll go through his statement with a nit-comb. I never did like the sound of him.'

'You never met him, did you?'

'Number two. There's the YWCA woman who spoke with Karin before she left for Oxford. She sounds nice.'

'But you never-'

'I spoke to her on the phone, Lewis, if you must know. She sounds nice -that's all I said. You don't mind, do you?'

Lewis smiled to himself. It was good to be back in harness.

'Number three,' resumed Morse. 'We must have a long session I with that Wytham fellow -the Lone Ranger, or whatever he's called.'

'Head forester, sir.'

'Exactly.'

'Did you like him?'

Morse turned over the palm of his right hand, and considered us inky fingers. 'He virtually told us where she was, didn't he? Told us

where he would hide a body if he had to . . . '

'Not likely to have told us if he'd put it there himself though, surely? Self-incrimination, that!'

Morse said nothing.

'The witnesses who said they saw her, sir - any good going back over them?'

'Doubt it, but . . . Anyway, let's put 'em down, number four. And number five, the parents-'

Just the mother, sir.'

'- in Uppsala -'

'Stockholm, now.'

'Yes. We shall have to see her again.'

'We shall have to tell her first, surely.'

'If it is Karin, you mean?'

'You don't really have much doubt, do you, sir?'

'No!'

'I suppose you'll be going there yourself? To Stockholm, I mean.'

Morse looked up, apparently with some surprise. 'Or you, Lewis.'

'Very kind of you, sir.'

'Not kind at all. Just that I'm scared stiff of flying -you know that'  
But the voice was a

little sad again. 'You all right?' Lewis asked quietly 'Will be soon - don't worry! Now, I just wonder whether Mr George Daley's still working on

the Blenheim Estate.' 'Saturday, though. More likely to be off today.' 'Yes ... And his son -Philip, was it? -the lad who had a short-birthday present of a

camera, Karin Eriksson's camera. He was still at school last year.' 'Probably still is.' 'No -not precisely so, Lewis. The state schools in Oxfordshire broke up yesterday, the

seventeenth.' 'How'd you know that?' 'I rang up and found out. That's how.' 'You've been having a fair old time on the phone!' said Lewis happily, as he got to his feet -

and went for the car.

As he drove out along the A44 to Begbroke, Lewis's eyes drifted briefly if incuriously to his left as Morse opened an envelope, took out a single handwritten sheet of A4 and read it; not (in fact) for the first, or even the fourth, time:

Dear Chief Inspector, V m t f y 1 and for your interesting choice of records. It would make a good debate in the Oxford Union -'This house believes that openness in matters of infidelity is preferable to deception.' But let me tell you what you want to know. I was married in '76, divorced in '82, remarried in '84, separated in '88. One child, a daughter now aged 20. Work that out, clever-clogs! As you know I consort fairly regularly with a married man from Oxford, and at less frequent intervals with others. So there! And now -Christ! -you come along and I hate you for it because you're monopolizing my thoughts just when I'd told myself I was beyond all that nonsense. I write for two reasons. First to say I reckon I've got some idea how that young girl who monopolizes your thoughts may have come by a bit of cash. (Same way I did!) Second to say you're an arrogant sod! You write to me as if you think I'm an ignorant little schoolgirl. Well let me tell you you're not the only sensitive little flower in the whole bloody universe. You quote these poets as if you think you're connected on some direct personal line with them all. Well you're wrong. There's hundreds of extensions, just like in the office I used to work. So there! Please write again. Dare I send you a little of my love? C.

Morse hadn't noticed the misspelling before; and as he put the letter away he promised himself not to mention it... when he wrote back.

'I'm still not quite sure why we're interviewing Mr Daley, sir.' 'He's hiding something, that's why.' 'But you can't say that-' 'Look, Lewis, if he's not hiding something, there's not much reason for us interviewing him,

is there?' Lewis, not unaccustomedly, was bewildered by such zany logic; and he let it go. Anyway, Morse was suddenly sounding surprisingly cheerful.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT**

Be it ever so humble there's no place like home for sending one slowly crackers

(Diogenes Small, Obiter Dicta) GEORGE DALEY, on overtime, was planting out flowers in the Blenheim Garden Centre when he looked up and saw the two men, the shorter of them flashing a warrant card briefly in front of his face. He knew what it was all about, of course. The Oxford Mail had been taking a keen interest in the resurrected case; and it would be only a matter of time, Daley had known, before the police would be round again.

'Mr Daley? Chief Inspector Morse. And this is Sergeant Lewis

Daley nodded, prodded his splayed fingers round a marigold and got to his feet. He was a man in his mid-forties, of slim build, wearing a shabby khaki-green pork-pie hat. This he pushed back slightly, revealing a red line on his sweaty forehead.

'It's that thing I found, I suppose?'

'Those things - yes,' said Morse carefully.

'I can only tell you the same as I told 'em at the time. I made a statement and I signed it. Nothin' else as I can do.'

Morse took a folded sheet of A4 from his inside pocket, opened it out, and handed it to Daley. 'I'd just like you to read this through and make sure it's -well, you know, see if there's anything else you can add.'

'I've told you. There's nothin' else'" Daley rubbed a hand across an unshaven cheek with the sound of sandpaper on wood.

'I'd just like you to read it through again,' said Morse simply 'That's all.'

'I shall need me specs. They're in the shed-'

'Don't worry now! Better if you give yourself a bit of time. No rush. As I say, all I want you to do is to make sure everything's there just as you said it, nothing's been missed out. It's often the little things, you know, that make all the difference.'

'If there was anythin' else I'd've told the other inspector, wouldn't I?'

Was it Lewis's imagination, or was there a momentary glint of anxiety in the gardener's pale eyes?

'Are you in this evening, Mr Daley?' asked Morse.

'Wha' - Saturday? I usually go over the pub for a jar or two at the weekends but-'

'If I called at your house about - what, seven?'

George Daley stood motionless, his eyes narrowed and unblinking as he watched the two detectives walk away through the archway and into the visitors' car park. Then his eyes fell on the photocopied statement once more. There was just that one thing that worried him, yes. It was that bloody boy of his who'd fucked it all up. More trouble than they were worth, kids. Especially him Becomin' a real troublemaker he was, gettin' in all hours -like last night. Three bloody thirty a.m. With his mates, he'd said -after the end-of-term knees-up. He'd got a key all right, of course, but his mother could never sleep till he was in. Silly bitch!

'Where to, sir?' queried Lewis.

'I reckon we'll just call round to see Mrs Daley.'

'What do you make of Mr?'

'Little bit nervous.'

'Most people get a bit nervous with the police.'

'Good cause, some of 'em,' said Morse.

Lewis had earlier telephoned Margaret Daley about her husband's whereabouts, and the woman who opened the door of number 2 Blenheim Villas showed no surprise. She appeared, on first impressions, a decided cut or two above her horticultural spouse: - neatly dressed, pleasantly spoken, well groomed -her light-brown hair professionally streaked with strands of blonde and grey.

Morse apologized for disturbing her, looked around him at the newly decorated, neatly furnished, through-lounge; offered a few nice-little-place-you-have-here' type compliments; and explained why they'd called and would be calling again -one of them, certainly -at seven o'clock that evening.

'It was you, Mrs Daley, wasn't it, who got your husband to hand the rucksack in?'

'Yes - but he'd have done it himself anyway. Later on. I know he would.'

The shelves around the living area were lined with china ornaments of all shapes and sizes; and Morse walked over to the shelf above the electric fire, and carefully picked up the figure of a small dog, examining it briefly before replacing it on its former station.

'King Charles?'

Margaret Daley nodded. 'Cavalier King Charles. We had one -till last February. Mycroft. Lovely little dog -lovely face! We all had a

good cry when the vet had to put him down. Not a very healthy breed, I'm afraid.'

'People living next to us have one of those,' ventured Lewis. 'Always at the vet. Got a medical history long as your arm.' 'Thank you, Lewis. I'm sure Mrs Daley isn't over-anxious to be reminded of a family bereavement'

'Oh, it's all right! I quite like talking about him, really. We all - Philip and George -we all loved him. In fact he was about the only thing that'd get Philip out of bed sometimes.'

But Morse's attention appeared to have drifted far from dogs as he gazed through the french windows at the far end of the room, his eyes seemingly focused at some point towards the back of the garden -a garden just over the width of the house and stretching back about fifty feet to a wire fence at the bottom, separating the property from the open fields beyond. As with the patch of garden in the front, likewise here: George Daley, it had to be assumed, reckoned he did quite enough gardening in the course of earning his daily bread at Blenheim, and carried little if anything of his horticultural expertise into the rather neglected stretch of lawn which provided the immediate view from the rear of number 2.

'I don't believe it!' said Morse. 'Isn't that *Asphodelina lutea*?'

Mrs Daley walked over to the window.

There!' pointed Morse. 'Those yellow things, just across the fence.'

'Butter cups!' said Lewis.

'You've . er, not got a pair of binoculars handy, Mrs Daley?'

'No - I - we haven't, I'm afraid.'

'Mind if we have a look?' asked Morse. 'Always contradicting me, my sergeant is!'

The three of them walked out through the kitchen door, past the (open) out-house door, and on to the back lawn where the daisies



and dandelions and broad-leaf plantain had been allowed a generous freedom of movement. Morse himself stepped up to the fence, looking down at the ground around him; then, cursorily, at the yellow flowers he had spotted earlier, and which he now agreed to be nothing rarer than buttercups. Mrs Daley smiled vaguely at Lewis; but Lewis was now listening to Morse's apparently aimless chatter with far greater interest.

'No compost heap?'

'No. George isn't much bothered with the garden here, as you can see. Says he's got enough, you know . . .' She pointed vaguely towards Blenheim, and led the way back in.

'How do you get rid of your rubbish then?'

'Sometimes we go down to the waste disposal with it. Or you can buy those special bags from the council. We used to burn it, but a couple of years ago we upset the neighbours -you know, bits all over the washing and-'

'Probably against the bye-laws, too,' added Lewis; and for once Morse appeared to appreciate the addendum.

It was Lewis too, as they were leaving, who spotted the rifle amid the umbrellas, the walking sticks, and the warped squash racket, in a stand just behind the front door.

'Does your husband do a bit of shooting?'

'Oh that! George occasionally . . . yes ...'

Gently, for a second time, Lewis reminded her of the law's demands: 'Ought to be under lock and key, that. Perhaps you'd remind your husband, Mrs Daley.'

Margaret Daley watched them through the front window as they walked away to their car. Just a bit of a stiff-shirt, the sergeant had been, about their legal responsibilities. Whereas the inspector - well, he'd seemed much nicer with his interest in dogs and flowers and the decoration in the lounge -her decoration. Yet during the

last few minutes she'd begun to suspect her judgement a little, and she had the feeling that it would probably be Morse who would be returning that evening. Not that there was anything to worry about, really. Well, just the one thing, perhaps.

In spite of that day being Saturday - and the first of the holidays - Mrs Julie Ireson, careers mistress at the Cherwell School, Oxford, had been quite willing to meet Lewis just after lunch; and Lewis was anxious to get the meeting over as soon as possible, for he was desperately tired and had been only too glad to accept Morse's strict directive for a long rest -certainly for the remainder of the day, and perhaps for the next day, Sunday, too - unless there occurred any dramatic development.

She was waiting in the deserted car park when Lewis arrived, and immediately took him up to her first-floor study, its walls and shelves festooned with literature on nursing, secretarial courses, apprenticeship schemes, industrial training, FE's, poly's, universities . . . For Lewis (whose only career advice had been his father's dictum that he could do worse than to keep his mouth mostly shut and his bowels always open), a school-based advice centre for pupils leaving school was an interesting novelty.

A buff-coloured folder containing the achievements of Philip Daley was on the table ready for him. Non-achievements rather. He was now just seventeen years old, and had officially abandoned any potential advancement into further education w.e.f. 17 July -the previous day. The school was prepared to be not over-pessimistic about some minor success in the five GCSE subject; in which, the previous term, he had tried (though apparently not overhard) to satisfy his examiners: English; Technical Drawing; Geography; General Science; and Communication Studies. Over the years, however, the reports from his teachers, even in non academic subjects, had exhibited a marked lack of enthusiasm about his attitude and progress. Yet until fairly recently -appeared not to have posed any great problem to the school community: limited, clearly, in intellectual prowess; limited too in most technical and vocational skills; in general about average.

Current educational philosophy (Lewis learned) encouraged a measure of self-evaluation, and amongst other documents in folder was a sheet on which eighteen months previously, in own handwriting, Philip had filled in a questionnaire about his six main 'Leisure Interests/Pastimes', in order of preference. The list read thus:

1 Football

2 Pop music

3 Photography

4 Pets

5 Motorbikes

6 TV

'He can spell OK,' commented Lewis.

'Difficult to misspell "pets", Sergeant.'

'Yes. But - well, "photography" . . .'

'Probably had to look it up in the dictionary.'

'You didn't like him?' said Lewis slowly.

'No, I'm afraid I didn't. I'm glad he's gone, if you must know.' She was younger than Lewis had expected: perhaps more vulnerable too?

'Any particular reason?'

'Just general, really.'

'Well, thanks very much, Mrs Ireson. If I could take the folder?'

'Any particular reason you want to know about him?'

'No. Just general, really,' echoed Lewis.

He slept from 6.30 that evening through until almost ten the following morning. When he finally awoke, he learned there had been a telephone message the previous evening from Morse: on no account was he to come in to HQ that Sunday; it would be a good idea though, to make sure his passport was in order.

Well, well!

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE**

Every roof is agreeable to the eye, until it is lifted; then we find tragedy

and moaning women, and hard-eyed husbands

(Ralph Waldo Emerson, Experience)

IT WAS two minutes to seven by the Jaguar's fascia clock when Morse pulled up in the slip-road outside number 2 Blenheim Villas. He was fairly confident of his ground now, especially after reading through the folder that Lewis had left. Certain, of course, about the electric fire in the Daleys' main lounge; almost certain about the conversion of the old coal-house into a utility room, in which, as they'd walked out to the garden, he'd glimpsed the arrangement of washing-machine and tumble-drier on newly laid red tiles; not quite so certain about the treeless back garden though, for Morse was ridiculously proud about never having been a boy scout, and his knowledge of camp-fires and cocoa-barbecues, he had to admit, was almost nil.

For once he felt relieved to be on his own as he knocked at the front door. The police as a whole were going through a tough time in public esteem: allegations of corrupt officers, planted evidence, improper procedures -such allegations had inevitably created suspicion and some hostility. And -yes, Morse knew it -he himself was on occasion tempted to overstep the procedural boundaries a little -as shortly he would be doing again. It was a bit like a darts player standing a few inches in front of the oche as he threw for the treble-twenty. And Lewis would not have brooked this; and would have told him so.

In the lounge, in a less than convivial atmosphere, the Daleys sat side by side on the settee; and Morse, from the armchair opposite, got down to business. .

'You've managed to go through the statement again, Mr Daley?'

'You don't mind the wife being here?'

'Id prefer it, really,' said Morse innocently.

'Like I said, there's nothin' as I can add.'

'Fine.' Morse reached across and took the now rather grimy photocopy and looked through it slowly himself before lifting his eyes to George Daley.

'Let me be honest with you, sir. It's this camera business that's worrying me.'

'Wha' abou' i'?' (If the dietitian sometimes had paid overnice attention to her dental consonants, Daley himself almost invariably ignored them.)

Morse moved obliquely into the attack: 'You interested in photography yourself?'

'Me? Not much, no.'

'You, Mrs Daley?'

She shook her head.

'Your son Philip is though?'

'Yeah, well, he's got fairly interested in it recently, hasn't he, luv?' Daley turned to his wife, who nodded vaguely, her eyes on Morse continuously.

'Bit more than "recently", perhaps?' Morse suggested. 'He put it down on his list of hobbies at school last year - early last year - a few months before you found the camera.'

'Yeah, well, like I said, we was going to get him one anyway, for his birthday. Wasn't we,

luv?'

Again, apart from a scarce-discernible nod, Margaret Daley appeared reluctant verbally to confirm such an innocent statement.

'But you've never had a camera yourself, you say.'

'Correck!'

'How did you know the film in the camera was finished then?'

'Well, you know, it's the numbers, innit? It tells you, like, when -.: u've got to the finish.'

"When it reads "ten", you mean?'

"Somethin' like that.'

'What if there are twelve exposures on the reel?'

'Dunno.' Daley appeared not to be at all flustered by the slightly more aggressive tone of the question. 'It was probably Philip as said so.' Again he turned to his wife. 'Was his ten or twelve, luv? Do you remember?'

Morse pounced on the answer: 'So he had a camera before?'

'Yeah, well, just an el cheapo thing we bought him-'

'From Spain.' (Mrs Daley had broken her duck.)

'Would you know how to get the film out of a camera, Mr Daley?'

'Well, not unless, you know-'

'But it says here' - Morse looked down at the statement again - 'it says here that you burnt the film.'

'Yeah, well, that's right, isn't it, luv? We shoulda kept it, I know. Still, as I said - well, we all do things a bit wrong sometimes, don't we? And we said we was sorry about everything, didn't we, luv?'

Morse was beginning to realize that the last three words, with their appropriate variants, were a rhetorical refrain only, and were not intended to elicit any specific response.

'Where did you burn it?' asked Morse quietly.

'Dunno. Don't remember. Just chucked it on the fire, I suppose.' Daley gestured vaguely with his right hand.

'That's electric,' said Morse, pointing to the fireplace.

'And we got a grate for a coal-fire next door. All right?' Daley's voice was at last beginning to show signs of some exasperation.

'Did you have a fire that day?'

'How the 'ell am I supposed to remember that?'

'Do you remember, Mrs Daley?'

She shook her head. 'More than a year ago, isn't it? Could you remember that far back?'

'I've not had a coal-fire in my flat for fifteen years, Mrs Daley. So I could remember, yes.'

'Well, I'm sorry,' she said quietly, 'I can't.'

'Did you know that the temperature in Oxfordshire that day was seventy-four degrees Fahrenheit?' (Morse thought he'd got it vaguely correct.)

'Wha'! At ten o'clock at night?' Clearly Daley was losing his composure, and Morse took full advantage.

'Where do you keep your coal? Your coal-house has been converted to a utility-room - your wife showed-'

'If it wasn't here - all right, it wasn't here. Musta been in the garden, mustn't it?'

'What do you burn in the garden?'

'What do I burn? What do I burn? I burn bloody twigs and leaves and-'

'You haven't got any trees. And even if you had, July's a bit early for leaves.'

'Oh, for Christ's sake! Look-'

'No!' Suddenly Morse's voice was harsh and authoritative. 'You look, Mr Daley. If you do burn your rubbish out there in the garden, come and show me where!' All pretence was now dropped as Morse continued: 'And if you make up any more lies about that, I'll bring a forensic team in and have 'em cart half your lawn away!'

They sat silently, the Daleys, neither looking at the other.

'Was it you who got the film developed, Mr Daley? Or was it your son?' Morse's voice was quiet once more.

'It was Philip,' said Margaret Daley, finally, now assuming control. 'He was friendly with this boy at school whose father was a photographer and had a dark-room an' all that, and they developed 'em there, I think.' Her voice sounded to Morse as if it had suddenly lost its veneer of comparative refinement, and he began to wonder which of the couple was potentially the bigger liar.

'You must tell me what those photographs were.' Morse made an effort to conceal the urgency of his request, but his voice betrayed the fear that all might well be lost.

'He never kept 'em as far as I know-' began Daley.

But his wife interrupted him: 'There were only six or seven out of the twelve that came out. There was some photos of birds - one was a pinkish sort of bird with a black tail-'



'Jay!' said Daley.

'-and there was two of a man, youngish man -probably her boyfriend. But the others, as I say . . . you know, they just didn't. . . come out.'

'I must have them,' said Morse simply, inexorably almost.

'He's chucked 'em out, surely,' observed Daley. 'What the 'ell would he keep 'em for?'

'I must have them,' repeated Morse.

'Christ! Don't you understand? I never even saw 'em!'

'Where is your son?'

Husband and wife looked at each other, and husband spoke: "Gone into Oxford, I should think Sa'day night. . .'

'Take me to his room, will you?'

'We bloody won't!' growled Daley. 'If you wanna look round 'ere, Inspector, you just bring a search-warrant, OK?'

'I don't need one. You've got a rifle behind the front door, Mr Daley, and it's odds-on you've got a box of cartridges somewhere lying around. All I need to do to take your floorboards up if necessary is to quote to you -just quote, mind -Statutory Instrument 1991 No. 1531. Do you understand? The pair of you? That's my only legal obligation.'

But Morse had no further need for inaccurate improvisations regarding the recently enacted legislation on explosives. Margaret Daley rose to her feet and made to leave the lounge.

'You won't search Philip's room with my permission, Inspector. But if he has kept them photos I reckon I just might know . . .'

Morse heard her on the stairs, his heart knocking against his ribs: Please! Please! Please!

No word passed between the two men seated opposite each other as they heard the creak of floorboards in the upstairs rooms. Nor was much said when Margaret Daley returned some minutes later holding seven coloured prints which she handed to Morse - wordlessly.

'Thank you. No others?'

She shook her head.

After Morse was gone, Margaret Daley went into the kitchen where she turned on the kettle and spooned some instant Nescafe into a mug.

'I suppose you're out boozing,' she said tonelessly, as her husband came in.

'Why the 'ell didn't you tell me about them photos?'

'Shut up!' She spat out the two words viciously and turned towards him.

'Where the 'ell did you find 'em, you-'

'Shut up! And listen, will you? If you must know, I've been looking in his room, George Daley, because if we don't soon get to know what's goin' on and do something about it he'll be in bloody jail or something, that's why! See? There were twelve photos, five of the girl-'

'You stupid bitch!'

'Listen!' she shrieked. 'I never gave him them\ I've hidden 'em; and now I'm gonna get rid of 'em; and I'm not gonna show 'em to you! You don't give a sod about anything these days, anyway!'

Daley walked tight-lipped to the door. 'Stop moaning, you miserable cunt!'

His wife had taken a large pair of kitchen scissors from a drawer. 'Don't you ever talk to me like that again, George Daley!' Her

voice was trembling with fury.

A few minutes after hearing the front door slam behind him, she went upstairs to their bedroom and took the five photographs out of her underwear drawer. All of them were of Karin Eriksson, nakedly or semi-nakedly lying in lewdly provocative postures. She could only guess how often her son had ogled these and similar photographs which he kept in a box at the back of his wardrobe, and which she had discovered when spring-cleaning his room the previous April. She took the five photographs to the loo, where standing over the pan she sliced strip after strip from the face, the shoulders, the breasts, the thighs, and the legs of the beautiful Karin Eriksson, intermittently flushing the celluloid slivers down into the Begbroke sewers.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY**

A man's bed is his resting-place, but a woman's is often her rack  
(James Thurber, *Further Fables for Our Time*)

THE AMBULANCE, its blue light flashing, its siren wailing, finally pulled into the Casualty Bay of the John Radcliffe 2 Hospital at 9.15 p.m. The grey face of the man hurriedly carried through the automatic doors on a stretcher -the forehead clammy with sweat, the breathing shallow and laboured -had told its immediate story to the red-belted senior nurse, who straightaway rang through to the medical houseman on duty, before joining one of her colleagues in taking off the man's clothes and fastening a hospital gown around his overweight frame. A series of hurried readings -of electrocardiograph, blood pressure, chest X-ray -soon confirmed the fairly obvious: a massive coronary thrombosis, so very nearly an immediately fatal one.

Two porters pushed the trolley swiftly along the corridors to the Coronary Care Unit, where they lifted the heavy man on to a bed; around which curtains were quickly drawn, and five leads connected to the man's chest and linked to monitors, which now gave continuous details of heart rhythm, blood pressure, and pulse rate, on the screen beside the bed. A very pretty, slightly

plump young nurse looked on as the houseman administered a morphine injection.

'Much hope?' she queried quietly a minute or two later, as the two of them stood at the central desk, where the VDU monitors from each of the small ward's six beds were banked.

'You never know, but. . .'

'Quite a well-known man, isn't he?'

'Taught me as a student. Well, I went to his lectures. Blood -that was his speciality, really; and he was a world authority on VD! Police get him in all the time, too -PMs, that sort of thing.'

The nurse looked at the monitor: the readings seemed significantly steadier now, and she found herself earnestly willing the old boy to survive.

'Give him some Frusemide, Nurse - as much as you like. I'm worried about all that fluid on his lungs.'

The houseman watched the monitor for another few minutes, then went over to the bed again, where the nurse had just placed a jug of water and a glass on the bedside locker.

After the houseman had left, Nurse Shelick remained beside the sick man's bed and looked down at him with that passionate intensity she invariably felt for her patients. Although still in her twenties, she was really one of that old-fashioned school who believed that whatever the advantages of hyper-technology, the virtues of simple human nursing were almost as indispensable. She laid the palm of her right hand across the wet, cold brow, and for the next few minutes wiped his face gently with a warm, damp flannel -suddenly aware that his eyes had opened and were looking up at her.

'Nurse?'

'I can hear you - yes?'

'Will you . . . will you ... get in touch . . . with someone for me?'

'Of course! Of course!' She bent her right ear towards the purple lips, but without quite making out what he was saying.

'Pardon?'

'Morse!'

'I'm sorry. Please say it again. I'm not quite sure-'

'Morse!'

'I still . . . I'm sorry . . . please.'

But the eyes of the man who lay upon the bed had closed again, and there was no answer to her gently repeated queries.

The time was 11.15 p.m.

The head forester's beautiful young wife was also in bed at this time. She too lay supine; and still lay supine, wakeful and waiting, until finally at 11.35 pm she heard the front door being opened, then locked, then bolted.

In spite of four pints of Burton ale and two whiskies at the White Hart, David Michaels knew that he was very sober; far too sober - for there was something sadly amiss when a man couldn't get drunk, he knew that. After cleaning his teeth, he went into the bedroom, shed his clothes swiftly, and slid under the lightweight duvet. She always slept naked, and after their marriage he had followed her example -often finding himself erotically aroused not so much by the fact or the sight of her nakedness as by the very thought of it. And now as he moved in beside her in the darkened room, he knew that she was suddenly and wonderfully necessary once 'more. He turned his body towards her and his right hand reached gently across her and fondled her breast. But with her own right hand she grasped his wrist, and with surprising strength moved it from her.

'No. Not tonight.'

'Is there something wrong?'

,

I just don't want you tonight - can't you understand?'

,

I think I understand all right.' Michaels' voice was dull and he turned to lie on his back.

'Why did you have to tell them?' she asked fiercely.

'Because I know the bloody place better than anyone else, that's why!'

'But don't you realize-?'

'I had to tell them something. God! Don't you see that? I didn't know, did I?'

She sat up in bed and leaned towards him, her right hand on the pillow beside his head. 'But they'll think you did it, David.'

'Don't be so stupid! I wouldn't be giving them information if it was me. Can't you see that? I'm the very last person they're going to suspect. But if I hadn't agreed to help

She said nothing more; and he wondered for a while whether it would be sensible to go down and make a couple of cups of piping-hot coffee for them, and then perhaps turn on the bedside lamp and look upon his lovely bride. But there was no need. Seemingly Cathy Michaels had accepted the logic of his words, and her mind was more at ease; for she now lay down again and turned towards him, and soon he felt the silky caress of her inner thigh against him.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE**

The background reveals the true being of the man or thing. If I do not possess the background, I make the man transparent, the

thing transparent (Juan Jimenez, Selected Writings)

IT WAS rather like trying to see the answer to a tricky crossword clue, Morse decided, as at 11 o'clock that same night he sat in his North Oxford lounge, topping up his earlier libations with a few fingers of Glenfiddich, and looking yet again at the photographs that Margaret Daley had given him. The closer he got to the clue - the closer he got to the photograph - the less in fact he saw. It was necessary to stand away, to see things in perspective, to look synoptically at the problem.

As he had just considered the photographs, it was the man himself, pictured in two of them, who had monopolized his interest: a small-to medium-sized man, in his late twenties perhaps, with longish fair hair; a man wearing a white T-shirt and faded-blue denims, with a sunburnt complexion and the suggestion of a day's growth of stubble around his jowls. But the detail was not of sufficient definition or fidelity for him to be wholly sure, as if the cameraman himself -or almost certainly the camerawoman -had scarcely the experience needed to cope with the problems of the bright sunlight that so obviously pervaded the garden in which the snaps had been taken. But although Morse knew little (well, anything) about photography, he was beginning to suspect that he might be slightly more competence in the arrangement of -ic subject' in relation to the 'background' than he'd originally supposed.

The man had been photographed at an oblique angle across the garden, with a house clearly shown to the left of the figure: a three-storey, rosy-bricked house, with a french window on the ground floor, slightly ajar, with another window immediately above it, and Be above that, all painted white, and with a black drain-pipe reaching down to ground level; and to the figure's right a smallish tree of some sort with large curly leaves, unidentifiable to Morse who knew little (well, nothing) of such things. But there was even more to learn. Clearly the photographer had been kneeling down, or sitting down, to take the shots, for the man's head showed some way above the line of the garden wall, which rose clearly behind the shrubs and foliage. Even more to learn

though! -Morse decided, as he studied the background yet again. The roof-line of the house stretched away in a slightly convex curve (as it appeared) above the man's head, and then was cut off in the middle of the top of the photograph; but not before suggesting that the house could be one of a terrace, perhaps?

It was amazing, Morse told himself, how much he'd managed to miss when first he'd considered the photographs; and with the strange conviction that there would certainly be a final solution to the mystery if only he looked at it long enough, he stared and stared until he thought he could see two houses instead of one, although whether this was an advance in insight or in inebriation, he couldn't be sure. So what, though? So what if it were part of a terrace? The number of three-storeyed, red-bricked terraces in the UK was myriad; and just in Oxford alone it must be ... Morse shook his head and shook his thoughts. No. It was going to be almost impossible to locate the house and the garden; so the only thing left was the young man's face, really.

Or was it. . . ?

Suddenly an exciting thought occurred to him. A straight line could be seen as a curve, so he'd been supposing, either because the camera had looked at it in a particular way, or because in a larger view the line began to bend in a sort of rounded perspective. But such explanations were surely far less probable than the utterly obvious fact that was staring him, literally staring him, in the face; the fact that the roof-line of the terraced houses which formed the backdrop here might look as if it was curving in a convex fashion for one supremely simple and wholly adequate reason: it was curving!

Could it be . . . ? Could it be . . . ? Did Morse, even now, think he knew where it was? He felt the old familiar tingle across his shoulders, and the hairs at the nape of his neck were suddenly erect. He rose from his armchair and went over to his bookshelves, whence he extracted the thick Penguin Oxfordshire, in the 'Buildings of England' series; and his right hand shook slightly as he traced Park Town' in the index - page 320. On which page he read:



Laid out in 1853-5. This was North Oxford's first development, built on land originally intended for a workhouse. The trust created for its developments promised elegant villas and [Morse's eyes snatched at the next word] terraces. What it became is this: two crescents [the blood tingled again] N and S of an elliptical central garden, with stone frontages in late-classical style, and bricked at the rear [!] with attractive french windows [!] leading on to small walled [!] gardens.

Phew!

Ye gods!

Bloody hell!

If he were so disposed (Morse knew) he could go and identify the house at that very moment! It must be in Crescent S -the sunshine would rule out Crescent N; and with that tree with its big, furry, splayed (beautiful!) leaves; and the drain-pipe, and the windows, and the wall, and the grass . . .

As he sat down again in the black leather settee, Morse's face was betraying a high degree of self-gratification -when the phone rang. It was now a quarter to midnight, and the voice was a woman's husky, slightly timid, north-country.

She identified herself as Dr Laura Hobson, one of the new girls in the path labs; one of Max's protegees. She had been working late with Max - on Morse's bones -when just before 9 p.m. she'd found him lying there on the floor of the lab. Heart attack -severe heart attack. He'd been unconscious most of the time since they'd got him to hospital. . . but the sister had rung her (Dr Hobson) and the possibility was that he (Max) had been trying to ask for him (Morse) -if he (Morse) knew what she (Dr Hobson) was trying to say . . .

Oh dear!

'Which ward's he in?'

'Coronary Care Unit-'

'Yes! But where?'

'The JRa. But it's no good trying to see him now. Sister says - '

'You want to bloody bet?' snapped Morse.

'Please! There's something else, Inspector. He'd been working on the bones all day and-'

'Bugger the bones!'

'But-'

'Look. I'm most grateful to you, Dr, er . . . '

'Hobson.'

'. . . but please forgive me if I hang up. You see,' suddenly Morse's voice was more controlled, more gentle, 'Max and I -well, we ... let's say we don't either of us have too many friends and ... I want to see the old sod again if he's going to die.'

But Morse had already put down the phone, and Dr Hobson heard nothing of the last five words. She too felt very sad. She had known Max for only six weeks. Yet there was something basically kindly about the

man; and only a week before she'd had a mildly erotic dream about that ugly, brusque, and arrogant pathologist.

At least for the present, however, the pathologist appeared to have rallied quite remarkably, for he was talking to Nurse Shellick rationally, albeit slowly and quietly, when he learned of his visitor; and threatened to strike the houseman off the medical register unless Morse (for such it was) were admitted forthwith.

But one patient newly admitted to the JR2 had not rallied that night. Marion Bridewell, an eight-yearold little West Indian girl, had been knocked down by a stolen car on the Broadmoor Lea

estate at seven o'clock that evening. She had been terribly badly injured. She died just after midnight.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO**

And Apollo gave Sarpedon dead to be borne by swift companions,  
to Death and Sleep,

twin brethren, who bore him through the air to Lycia, that broad  
and pleasant land

(Homer, Iliad, xvi)

'How ARE you, old friend?' asked Morse with spurious cheerfulness.

'Dying.'

'You once told me that we're all moving towards death - at the standard rate of twenty-four hours per diem.'

'I was always accurate, Morse. Not very imaginative, agreed; at always accurate.'

'You've still not told me how-'

'Somebody said . . . somebody said, "Nothing matters very much . . . and in the end nothing really matters at all'

'Lord Balfour.'

'You always were a knowledgeable sod.' 'Dr Hobson rang-'

'Ah! The fair Laura. Don't know how men ever keep their hands off her.'

'Perhaps they don't.'

'I was just thininking of her just now . . . Still have any erotic day-dreams yourself,

Morse?' "Most of the time.'

'Be nice - be nice if she was thinking of me ...'

'You never know.'

Max smiled his awkward, melancholy smile, but his face looked and ashen-grey. 'You're right. Life's full of uncertainties, have I ever told you that before?'

'Many a time.'

'I've always . . . I've always been interested in death, you know, of hobby of mine, really. Even when I was a lad . . .'

'I know. Look, Max, they said they'd only let me in to see you if-

'No knickers - you know that?'

'Pardon? Pardon, Max?'

'The bones, Morse!'

'What about the bones?'

'Do you believe in God?'

'Huh! Most of the bishops don't believe in God.'

'And you used to accuse me of never answering questions!'

Morse hesitated. Then he looked down at his old friend and answered him: 'No.' Paradoxically perhaps, the police surgeon appeared comforted by the sincerity of the firm monosyllable; but his thoughts were now stuttering their way around a discontinuous circuit.

'You surprised, Morse?'

'Pardon?'

'You were, weren't you? Admit it!'

'Surprised?'

'The bones! Not a woman's bones, were they?'

Morse felt his heart pounding insistently somewhere -everywhere - in his body; felt the blood sinking down from his shoulders, past his heart, past his loins. Not a woman's bones -is that what Max had just said?

It had taken the hump-backed surgeon some considerable time to say his say; and feeling a tap on his shoulder, Morse turned to find Nurse Shelick standing behind him. 'Please!' her lips mouthed, as she looked anxiously down at the tired and intermittently closing eyes.

But before he left Morse leaned forward and whispered in the dying man's ear: 'I'll bring us a bottle of malt in the morning, Max, and we'll have a wee drop together, my old friend. So keep a hold on things

- please keep a hold on things! . . . Just for me!'

It would have been a joy for Morse had he seen the transient gleam in Max's eyes. But the surgeon's face had turned away from him, towards the recently painted, pale-green wall of the GCU. And he seemed to be asleep.

Maximilian Theodore Siegfried de Bryn (his middle names a surprise even to his few friends) surrendered to an almost totally welcome weariness two hours after Chief Inspector Morse had left; and finally loosed his grip on the hooks just after three o'clock that morning. He had bequeathed his mortal remains to the Medical Research Foundation at the JRa. He had earnestly wished it so. And it would be done.

Many had known Max, even if few had understood his strange ways. And many were to feel a fleeting sadness at his death. But he had (as we have seen) a few friends only. And there was only one man who had wept silently when the call had been received in his office in Thames Valley Police HQ at Kidlington at 9 a.m. on Sunday, 19 July 1992.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

What is a committee? A group of the unwilling, picked from the unfit, to do the unnecessary

(Richard Harkness, New York Herald Tribune, 15 June 1960)

SUNDAY is not a good day on which to do business. Or to expect others to be at work -or even to be out of bed. But Dr Laura Hobson was out of bed fairly early that morning, and awaiting Morse at the (deserted) William Dunn School of Pathology building at 9.30. a.m.

'Hello.'

'Hello.'

'You're Inspector Morse?'

'Chief Inspector Morse.'

'Sorry!'

'And you're Dr Hobson?'

'I am she.'

Morse smiled wanly. 'I applaud your grammar, my dear.'

'I am not your "dear". You must forgive me for being so blunt: but I'm no one's "luv" or "dear" or "darling" or "sweetheart". I've got a name. If I'm at work I prefer to be called Dr Hobson; and if I let my hair down over a drink I have a Christian name: Laura. That's my little speech, Chief Inspector! You're not the only one who's heard it.' She was smiling sufficiently as she spoke though, showing small, very white teeth -a woman in her early thirties, fair-complexioned, with a pair of disproportionately large spectacles on her pretty nose; a smallish woman, about 5 foot 4 inches. But it was her voice which interested Morse: the broad north-country vowels in "luv" and "blunt"; the pleasing nairm she had -and

perhaps the not unpleasant prospect of meeting her sometime over a drink with her hair down . . . \*

They sat on a pair of high stools in a room that reminded Morse of his hated physics lab at school, and she told him of the simple yet quite extraordinary findings. The report on which Max had been working, though incomplete, was incontestable: the bones discovered in Wytham Woods were those of an adult male, Caucasian, about 5 foot 6 inches in height, slimly built, brachycephalic, fair-haired . . .

But Morse's mind had already leaped many furlongs ahead of the field. He'd been sure that the bones had been those of Karin Eriksson. All right, he'd been wrong. But now he knew whose bones they were -for the face of the man in the photograph was staring back at him, unmistakably. He asked only for a photocopy of Dr Hobson's brief, preliminary report, and rose to go.

The pair of them walked to the locked outer door in silence, for the death of Max was heavy on her mind too.

'You knew him well, didn't you?'

Morse nodded.

'I feel so sad,' she said simply.

Morse nodded again. ' "The cart is shaken all to pieces, and the rugged road is at its end." '

She watched him, the slightly balding grey-haired man, as he stood for a few seconds beside his Jaguar. He held the photocopied report in his left hand, and raised it a few inches in farewell. She relocked the door, and walked thoughtfully back to the lab.

Morse wondered about driving up to the JR2, but decided against it. There was little time anyway. An urgent meeting of senior police officers had been summoned for 11 a.m. at the HQ building, and in any case there was nothing he could do. He drove along Parks Road, past Keble College, and then turned right into the Banbury

Road. He had a few minutes to spare, and he took the second next turn now, and drove on slowly into Park Town, driving clockwise along the North Crescent, and along the South Crescent. . . There would be little chance of doing much that day though, and in any case it would be better to postpone things for twenty-four hours or so.

\* Senior personnel from both the City and the County Forces were meeting at a time of considerable public disquiet -and criticism. Hitherto the impression had been abroad that known ringleaders were joy-riding and shop-ramming almost with impunity; and that the police were doing little to check the teenage tearaways who were terrifying many sections of the community on the Broadmoor Lea estate. There was little justification for such a view, since the police were continually finding themselves hamstrung by the refusal of the local inhabitants to come out and name names and co-operate in seeking to clean up their crime-ridden neighbourhood. But the death of Marion Bridewell had changed all that.

During this Sunday, 19 July, major decisions were taken, and their immediate implementation planned: a string of arrests would be made in a co-ordinated swoop the following morning, with special sittings of magistrates' courts scheduled for the following two evenings; council workmen would be sent in during the next few days to erect bollards and to construct sleeping-policeman humps across selected streets; police presence on the estate during the next week would be doubled; and a liaison committee of police officers, local head-teachers, social workers, and church ministers would be constituted forthwith.

It was a long and sometimes ill-humoured meeting; and Morse himself contributed little of any importance to the deliberations, for in truth his mind was distanced, and only once had his interest been fully engaged. It had been Strange's inveterate cynicism about committees which had occasioned the little contretemps:

'Give us a week or two at this rate,' he growled, 'and we'll have a standing committee, a steering committee, an ad hoc committee - every committee you can put a name to. What we should be doing



is hitting 'em where it hurts. Fining 'em; fining their dads; docking it off their dads' wages. That's what I reckon!'

The Chief Constable had agreed quietly. 'Splendid idea -and the new legislation, I think, is going to be a big help to us. But there's just one snag, isn't there? You see, a good many of these young lads haven't got any fathers, Superintendent.'

Strange had looked disconcerted then.

And Morse had smiled his second smile of the day.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR**

The newly arrived resident in North Oxford is likely to find that although his

next-door neighbour has a first-class degree from some prestigious university this

man is not quite so clever as his wife

(Country Living, January 1992)

MORSE was on his own when finally, in mid-morning the following day, he drove down to Park Town, this time again slowly circling the two crescents on either side of the elliptical central garden, well stocked with trees and flowering shrubs. There were plenty of parking spaces, and after his second circuit he pulled in the Jaguar along the south side and walked past the fronts of the dozen Italianate properties which comprised the attractive stone-faced terrace. At the eastern end he turned down an alley-way, and then into the lane, about three yards wide, which ran behind the properties. To his right the continuous brick wall which protected the small back gardens was only about five feet in height, and he realized that it would not even be necessary to enter any of the gardens to find the one he was looking for. It was all childishly easy - no Holmesian intellect needed here; indeed a brief Watsonian reconnoitre would have established the spot almost immediately. Thus it was that after only a couple of minutes Morse

found himself leaning over the curved coping-stones of the western-most property, and finding the details on his photographs so easily matchable here: the configuration of the black drain-pipes, the horizontal TV aerial, and then, crucially, the tree upon whose lower bough a child's red swing was now affixed. At the left of the garden, as Morse observed it, was a wooden garden seat, its slats disintegrating; and he felt thrillingly certain that it was from this scat, in this very garden, that someone -and most probably Karin Eriksson herself -had taken the two photographs of the fair-beaded, bracycephalic, slimly built. . . what else had Dr Hobson said? He couldn't remember. And it didn't matter. Not at all.

He walked to the imposing front door of the end property, designated 'Seckham Villa' by a small plaque on the right-hand wall of the porch; and below it, three bells: second floor Dr S. Levi; first floor Ms Jennifer Coombs; ground floor Dr Alasdair McBryde. An area clearly where D.Phils and Ph.Ds proliferated. He rang the bottom bell.

The door was opened by a tallish, heavily bearded man in his mid-thirties, who studied Morse's authorization cautiously before answering any questions. He was over from Ostrylia (he said) with his wife, to pursue some research project in micro-biology; they had been in the flat since the previous August, and would be returning home in two weeks' time; he'd learned of the property from a friend in Mansfield College who had been keeping an eye open for suitable accommodation the previous summer.

The previous August. . .

Was this to be Morse's lucky day?

'Did you know the people - did you meet the people who were here before you?'

'Fried not,' said the Australian.

'Can I - have a quick look inside?'

Rather unenthusiastically, as it seemed, McBryde led the way into the lounge, where Morse looked around the rather splendid, high-ceilinged room, and tried to attune his senses to the vaguest vibrations. Without success. It was only when he looked out through the french window at the sunlit patch of lawn that he felt a frisson of excitement: a dark-haired little girl in a pink dress was swinging idly to and fro beneath the tree, her white ankle-socked feet just reaching the ground.

'Your daughter, sir?'

'Yeah. You got any kids yourself, Inspector?'

Morse shook his head. 'Just one more thing, sir. Have you got your book, you know, your rent-book or whatever handy? It's important I get in touch with the, er, people who were here just before you last year ..."

McBryde stepped over to an escritoire beside the french window and found his Property Payment book, the legend 'Finders Keepers' on the cover.

'I'm not in arrears,' said McBryde with the suggestion of his first smile.

'So I see. And I'm not a bailiff, sir,' said Morse, handing back the book.

The two men walked back towards the entrance, and McBryde knocked very gently on the door to his right, and put his ear to the panel.

'Darling? Darling?'

But there was no reply.

At the front door Morse asked his last question.

'Finders Keepers - that's the Banbury Road office, is it?'

'Yeah. You off there now?'

'I think I'll drop in straightaway, yes.'

'Is your car parked here?'

Morse pointed to the Jaguar.

'Well, I should leave it here, if I were you. Only five minutes' walk, if that -and you'll never park in North Parade.'

Morse nodded. Good idea. And the Rose and Crown was just along in North Parade.

Before leaving Park Town however, Morse strolled across into the central oval-shaped garden separating the Crescents, where he read the only notice he could find, fixed to the trunk of a cedar tree:

THIS GARDEN, LAID OUT CIRCA 1850, IS MAINTAINED BY THE RESIDENTS FOR PLEASURE AND PEACE. PLEASE RESPECT ITS AMENITIES. NO DOGS, BICYCLES, BALL GAMES, OR TRANSISTORS.

For a few minutes Morse sat on one of the wooden seats, where someone had obviously not respected the amenities, for an oblong plate, doubtless commemorating the name of a former inhabitant, had been recently prised from the back. It was a restful spot though, and Morse now walked slowly round its periphery, his mind half on Max's death, half on the photographs taken in the back garden of the ground-floor flat at Seckham Villa. As he turned at the western edge of the garden, he realized that this same Seckham Villa was immediately across the road from him, with the maroon Jaguar parked just to the left of it. And as once again he admired the attractive frontages there, he suspected perhaps a heavily bearded face had suddenly pulled itself back behind rather dingy curtains in the front room of Seckham Villa, where Mrs Something McBryde lay suffering from goodness knows what. Was her husband slightly more inquisitive than he'd appeared to be? Or was it the Jaguar - which often attracted some interested glances?

Thoughtfully Morse walked out of Park Town, then left into the Banbury Road. Finders Keepers was very close. So was North Parade. So was the Rose and Crown.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE**

Doing business without advertising is like winking at a girl in the dark. You know what you are doing, but nobody else does (Steuart Henderson Britt, New York Herald Tribune, 30 October 1956)

AFTER two pints of cask-conditioned ale in the Rose and Crown, Morse walked the short distance to Finders Keepers, where he was soon ushered through the outer office, past two young ladies busy with their VDUs, and into the inner sanctum of Mr Martin Buckby, the dark, smartly suited manager of Property Letting Services. It was fairly close to lunch-time, but the manager would be only too glad to help - of course he would.

Yes, his department was responsible for letting a good many of the Park Town properties, most of which had been converted from single homes into two, sometimes three, flats and were more often than not let out to graduates, occasionally to students. Naturally the accommodation varied, but some of the flats, especially those the ground floor -or first floor, as some of them called it were roomy, stylish, and well maintained. The letting year usually divided itself into two main periods: October to June, covering the academic year at Oxford University; and then June/July to the end of September, when very frequently various overseas tenants: interested in short-term leases. Advertisements for the availability of such accommodation were regularly placed in The Oxford Times, and occasionally in Property Weekly. But only advertised once, for the flats were almost invariably snapped up straightaway. Such adverts gave a brief description of the property available, and the price asked: about £200-£250 a week for a short-term let (at current and slightly less, proportionately, for a long-term let. Business in the first instance, was usually conducted by phone, often through agents; and someone -either the client himself or a representative of an agency -would go along to view the property ('Very important, Inspector!') before the paperwork was completed, either there in the firm's offices or, increasingly

now, directly by fax interchange with countries overseas. A deposit would be lodged, a tenancy agreement signed, a reference given -that was how it worked. There was no guarantee of bona fides, of course, and basically one had to rely on gut-reaction; but the firm experienced very few problems, really. When the client was due to move in, a representative would go along to open the property, hand over keys, explain the workings of gas, electricity, stop-cocks, central heating, fuses, thermostats, everything, and to give the client a full inventory of the property's effects -this inventory to be checked and returned within seven days so that there could be no subsequent arguments about the complement of fish-knives or feather pillows. The system worked well. The only example of odd behaviour over the previous year, for example, had been the overnight disappearance of a South American gentleman who had taken his key with him -and absolutely nothing else. And since, as with all short-term lets, the whole of the rental was paid in advance, as well as an extra deposit of £500, no harm had been done there -apart from the need to change the lock on the front door and to get a further clutch of keys cut.

'Did you report that to the police, sir?'

'No. Should I have done?'

Morse shrugged.

He had a good grasp now of the letting procedure; yet his mind was always happier (he explained) with specific illustrations than with generalities; and if it were proper for him to ask, for example, what Dr McBryde was paying for the ground-floor flat at Seckham Villa . . . ?

Buckby found a green folder in the filing cabinet behind him and quickly looked through it. 'Thirteen hundred pounds per month.'

'Phew! Bit steep, isn't it?'

'It's the going rate -and it's a lovely flat, isn't it? One of the best in the whole crescent.' Buckby picked out a sheet from the folder

and read the specification aloud.

But Morse was paying scant attention to him. After all, that was the manager's job, wasn't it? To make the most of what Morse had seen with his own eyes as a pretty limited bit of Lebensraum. especially for a married couple with one infant - at least one infant.

'Didn't you just say that the maximum for a short-term let was two hundred and fifty pounds a week?'

Buckby grinned. 'Not for that place -well, you've seen it. And what makes you think it's a short-term let, Inspector?' The blood was tingling at the back of Morse's neck, and subliminally some of the specifications that Buckby had recited were beginning to register in his brain. He reached over and picked up the sheet.

Hall, living room, separate dining room, well-fitted kitchen, two bedrooms, studio/ study, bathroom, full gas CH, small walled garden

Two bedrooms . . . and a sick wife sleeping in one of them . . . studio . . . and a little girl sitting on a swing . . . God! Morse shook head in disbelief at his own idiocy.

'I really came to ask you, sir, if you had any record of who was living in that property last July. But I think - I think -you're going to tell me that it was Dr Alasdair McBryde; that he hasn't got a wife; that the people upstairs have got a little dark-haired daughter; that the fellow probably hails from Malta-'

Gibraltar, actually.'

'You've got some spare keys, sir?' asked Morse, almost despairingly

In front of Seckham Villa the Jaguar sat undisturbed; but inside there were to be no further sightings of Dr McBryde. Yet the little girl still sat on the swing, gently stroking her dolly's hair, and

Morse unlocked the french window and walked over the grass towards her.

'What's your name?'

'My name's Lucy and my dolly's name's Amanda.'

Do you live here, Lucy?'

'Yes. Mummy and Daddy live up there.' Her bright eyes lifted to the top rear window.

'Pretty dolly,' said Morse.

'Would you like to hold her?'

'I would, yes - but I've got a lot of things to do just for the moment.'

Inside his brain he could hear a voice shouting, 'Help, Lewis!' and he turned back into the house and wondered where on earth to start.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX**

Nine tenths of the appeal of pornography is due to the indecent feelings concerning

sex which moralists inculcate in the young; the other tenth is physiological, and

will occur in one way or another whatever the state of the law may be

(Bertrand Russell, Marriage and Morals]

LEWIS arrived at Seckham Villa at 2.15 that afternoon, bringing ith him the early edition of The Oxford Mail, in which many column-inches were devoted to the wave of car crime which was hitting Oxfordshire -hitting the national press, too, with increasing regularity. Everyone and everything in turn was blamed: the



police, the parents, the teachers, the church, the recession, unemployment, lack of youth facilities, car manufacturers, the weather, TV, the brewers, left-wing social workers, and right-wing social workers; original sin received several votes, and even the Devil -self got one. Paradoxically the police seemed to be more in the dock than the perpetrators of the increasingly vicious crimes being emitted. But at least the operation that morning had been successful, so Lewis reported: the only trouble was that further police activity in Wytham Woods was drastically curtailed -four men -only now, one of them standing guard over the area cordoned in Pasticks.

The temporarily dispirited Morse received the news with little surprise, and briefly brought Lewis up to date with his own ambivalent achievements of the morning: his discovery of the garden where in all probability Karin Eriksson had spent some period of time before she disappeared; and his gullibility in allowing. McBryde -fairly certainly now a key figure in the drama -more than sufficient time to effect a hurried escape.

At the far end of the ground-floor entrance passage, fairly steep stairs, turning 180 degrees, led down to the basement area in Seckham Villa, and it was here that the first discovery was made. The basement comprised a large, modernized kitchen at the front; and behind this, through an archway, a large living area furnished with armchairs, a settee, coffee tables, bookshelves, TV, HiFi equipment -and a double-bed of mahogany, stripped down to a mattress of pale blue; and beside the bed, a jointed series of square, wooden boards, four of them, along which, for the length of about ten feet, ran two steel rails -rails where, it was immediately assumed, a cine-camera had recently and probably frequently been moving to and fro.

Morse himself (with Lewis and one of the DCs) spent most of his time that afternoon in this area, once the fingerprint men, the senior scenes-of-crime officer and the photographer had completed their formal tasks. Clear fingerprints on the (unwashed) non-stick saucepan and cutlery found in the kitchen sink would doubtless match the scores of others found throughout the flat,

would doubtless be McBryde's, and (as Morse saw things) would doubtless advance the investigation not one whit. No clothing, apart from two dirty pairs of beige socks found in one of the bedrooms; no toiletries left along the bathroom shelves; no videos; no correspondence; no shredded letters in either of the two waste-paper baskets or in the dustbin outside the back door. All in all it seemed fairly clear that the flat had been slimmed down - recently perhaps? -for the eventuality of a speedy get-away. Yet there were items that had not been bundled and stuffed into the back of the white van which (as was quickly ascertained) McBryde had used for travelling; and cupboards in both the ground-floor and the basement contained duvets, sheets, pillow-cases, blankets, towels, and table cloths -clearly items listed on the tenant's inventory; and the kitchen pantry was adequately stocked with tins of beans, fruit, salmon, spaghetti, tuna fish, and the like.

Naturally however it was the trackway beside the basement double bed which attracted the most interest, much lifting of eyebrows, and many lascivious asides amongst those investigators whose powers of detection, at least in this instance, were the equal of the chief inspector's. Indeed, it would have required a man of monumental mutton-headedness not to visualize before him the camera and the microphone moving slowly alongside the mattress to record the assorted feats of fornication enacted on that creaking charpoy. For himself Morse tried not to give his imagination too free a rein. Sometimes up at HQ there were a few pornographic videos around, confiscated from late-night raids or illegal trafficking. Often had he wished to view some of the crude, corrupting, seductive things; yet equally often had he made it known to his fellow officers that he at least was quite uninterested in such matters.

In a corner of the kitchen, bundled neatly as if for some subsequent collection by Friends of the Earth, was a heap of old newspapers, mostly the Daily Mail, and various weeklies and periodicals, including Oxford Today, Oxcom, TV Times, two RSPB journals, and the previous Christmas offers from the Spastic Society. Morse had glanced very hurriedly through, half hoping

perhaps to find the statutory girlie magazine; but apart from spending a minute or so looking at pictures of the black-headed gulls on the Loch of Kinnordy, he found nothing there to hold his interest.

It was Lewis who found them, folded away inside one of the free local newspapers, The Star. There were fourteen A4 sheets, stapled together, obviously photocopied (and photocopied ill) from some glossier and fuller publication. On each sheet several photographs of the same girl were figured (if that be the correct verb) in various stages of undress; and at the bottom of each sheet there appeared a Christian name, followed by details of height, bust, waist, hips, dress-shoe-and glove-measurements, and colour of hair and eyes. In almost every case the bottom left-hand picture was of the model completely naked, and in three or four cases striking some sexually suggestive pose. The names were of the glitzy showgirl variety: Jayne, Kelly, Lindy-Lu, Mandy . . . and most of them appeared (for age was not given) to be in their twenties. But four of the sheets depicted older women, whose names were possibly designed to reflect their comparative maturity: Elaine, Dorothy, Mary, Louisa . . . The only other information given (no addresses here) was a (i), (ii), (iii), of priority "services", and Lewis, not without some little interest himself (and amusement), sampled a few of the services on offer: sporting-shots, escort duties, lingerie, stockings, leather, swim-wear, summer dresses, bras, nude-modelling, hair-styling, gloves. Not much to trouble the law there, surely. Three of the girls though were far more explicit about their specialisms, with Mandy listing (i) home • ideos, (ii) pornographic movies, (iii) overnight escort duties; and with Lindy-Lu, pictured up to her thighs in leather boots, proclaiming an accomplished proficiency in spanking.

And then, as Morse and Lewis were considering these things, the big discovery was made. One of the two DCs who had been given the job of searching the main lounge above had found, caught up against the top of one of the drawers in the escritoire, a list of names and addresses: a list of clients, surely! Clients who probably received their pornographic material in plain brown envelopes with the flap licked down so very firmly. And there,

fourth from the top, was the name that both Morse and Lewis focused on immediately: George Daley, 2 Blenheim Villas, Begbroke, Oxon.

Morse had been delighted with the find -of course he had! And his praise for the DC had been profuse and (in Lewis's view) perhaps a trifle extravagant. Yet now as he sat on the settee, looking again at the unzippings and the unbuttonings of the models, reading through the list of names once more, he appeared to Lewis to be preoccupied and rather sad.

'Everything all right, sir?'

'What? Oh yes! Fine. We're making wonderful progress. Let's keep at it!'

But Morse himself was contributing little towards any further progress; and after desultorily walking around for ten minutes or so, he sat down yet again and picked up the sheet of addresses. He would have to tell Lewis, he decided -not just yet but. . . He looked again at the seventeenth name on the list: for he was never likely to forget the name that Kidlington HQ had given him when, from Lyme Regis, he'd phoned in the car registration H 35 LWL:

Dr Alan Hardinge.

He picked up the pictures of the models and looked again through their names and their vital statistics and their special proficiencies. Especially did he look again at one of the maturer models: the one who called herself 'Louisa'; the one who'd had all sorts of fun with her names at the Bay Hotel in Lyme Regis; the woman who was photographed here, quite naked and totally desirable.

Claire Osborne.

'Pity we've no address for - well, it must be a modelling agency of some sort, mustn't it?'

'No problem, Lewis. We can just ring up one of these johnnies on the list.'

'Perhaps they don't know.' '

'I'll give you the address in ten minutes if you really want it.'

'I don't want it for myself, you know.'

'Of course not!'

Picking up his sheets, Morse decided that his presence in Seckham Villa was no longer required; and bidding Lewis to give things another couple of hours or so he returned to HQ; where he tried her telephone number.

She was in.

'Claire?'

'Morse!' (She'd recognized him!)

'You could have told me you worked for an escort agency!'

'Why?'

Morse couldn't think of an answer.

'You thought I was wicked enough but not quite so wicked as that?'

'I suppose so.'

'Why don't you get yourself in your car and come over tonight? - I'd be happy if you did ...'

Morse sighed deeply. 'You told me you had a daughter-'

'So?'

'Do you still keep in touch with the father?'

'The father? Christ, come off it! I couldn't tell you who the father was!'

Like the veil of the Temple, Morse's heart was suddenly rent in twain; and after asking her for the name and address of the modeling? agency (which she refused to tell him) he rang off.

Ten minutes later, the phone went on Morse's desk, and it was Claire -though how she'd got his number he didn't know. She spoke for only about thirty seconds, ignoring Morse's interruptions.

'Shut up, you silly bugger! You can't see more than two inches in front of your nose, can you? Don't you realize I'd have swapped all the lecherous sods I've ever had for you -and instead of trying understand all you ask me - Christ! - is who fathered-'

'Look, Claire-'

'No! You bloody look! If you can't take what a woman tells you - about herself without picking over the past and asking bloody futile questions about why and who he was and-' But her voice broke down completely now.

'Look, please!'

'No! You just fuck off, Morse, and don't you ring me again because I'll probably be screwing somebody and enjoying it such a lot I won't want to be interrupted-'

'Claire!'

But the line was dead.

For the next hour Morse tried her number every five minutes, counting up to thirty double-purrs each time. But there was no answer.

Lewis had discovered nothing new in Seckham Villa, and he rang through to HQ at 6 p.m., as Morse

had wished.

'All right. Well, you get off home early, Lewis. And get some sleep. And good luck tomorrow!'

Lewis was due to catch the 7.30 plane to Stockholm the following morning.

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN**

To be buried while alive is, beyond question, the most terrifying of those extremes which has ever fallen to the lot of mere mortality (Edgar Allan Poe, Tales of Mystery and Imagination)

THE DEATH